

Screen Time All the Time

Apps and kids: A year trapped behind screens

A full year of 2020 trends and insights on children's screen time habits globally and across three major markets and five popular app categories

Our predictions on kids' screen time use and app popularity in 2021

Expert advice for parents on creating online safety and screen time balance during the rest of the pandemic and beyond



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Screen time All the time

ABOUT THIS REPORT

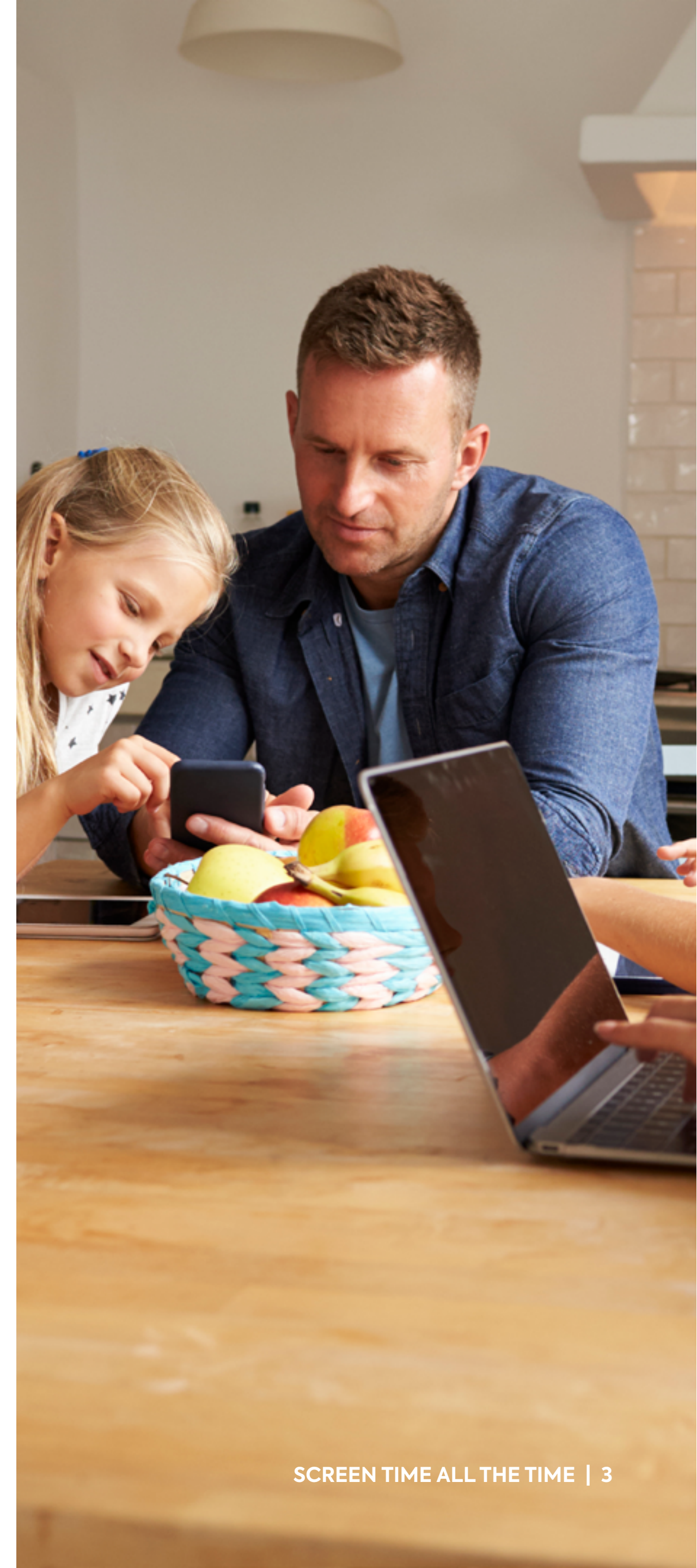
One year ago we released our first annual report on children's digital habits based on app activity during most of 2019. We also gave an early preview of 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic hit and made an immediate impact on screen time. In last year's research, we analyzed four app categories – **online video, social media, gaming and education** – across three major markets: the **US**, the **UK** and **Spain**. This year, we take our research a step further by analyzing the entire 2020 year, including a **global** view, and adding a fifth app category, **communication apps**. In every chapter, we share graphs on the **most popular apps** based on the percentage of kids using them, the average **time spent per popular app**, the average **time spent per app category** as a whole, the **times of day** kids used apps in that category, and the apps parents **blocked most**.

The goal of this year's report is to give everyone interested in children's safety and wellbeing a broader view of what kid's screen time habits were like in 2020, how they evolved, and what to look out for in 2021. We also aim to help parents make better online safety and screen time decisions for their families. That's why, we close each chapter with screen time advice from expert **doctors, psychologists, gaming, digital wellbeing and technology experts** from around the world.

As always, Qustodio aims to be a global, independent and trustworthy voice on everything related to digital wellbeing – from online safety to screen time balance. We hope the insights and information in this report, and the tips from experts in technology and health, prove useful to other researchers, educators, health and technology professionals, and above all, families.

ABOUT QUSTODIO

Founded in 2012, by cyber-security experts Eduardo Cruz, Josep Gaspar and Josh Gabel, [Qustodio](#) is an independent, digital wellbeing company. We focus on providing families with industry leading parental control tools and information to protect children from online threats and to create healthy screen time habits. We love technology and want people to use it with confidence and peace of mind, not in fear of their health, safety or privacy. That's why we make it our mission to **help families live smarter in an increasingly digital world**.



Methodology

The information in this report is based on anonymous insights provided by **100k families with children aged 4-15 years old, globally, in the US, the UK and Spain.** The research covers online habits from **January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020** and February 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019, across five popular app categories: **Online Video, Social Media, Gaming, Education, and Communication.**

The lines between app categories continue to blur, but for simplicity we have chosen just **one category per app.** For example, though TikTok provides online videos, we have classified it as Social Media. And though Twitch has social elements, we include it in our analysis of Online Video. For education apps, in terms of popularity, we divided the category into two sub-categories: **classroom management apps**, such as Google Classroom and Show My Homework, and **learning apps**, such as Duolingo and Photomath.

What's not included in the research? We have excluded **gambling** apps such as Bet365 and **'game launchers'** such as Epic Games Launcher and Steam from video games. Finally, for communication apps, we did not include **email platforms** like Gmail or **native phone apps** like Phone.

Thanks

We want to thank all of the experts who contributed to the creation of this report by sharing their professional advice, experience and insights:

Dr. Nicole Beurkens, Holistic Child Psychologist

Dr. Cecily Dvorak Havert, Primary Care Physician Board Certified in Family Medicine and Top Doc Washingtonian

Malcolm Bain, Legal and Privacy Expert

Marc Masip, Psychologist, Expert in Addiction, and Founder of Desconecta

Maria Guerrero, Family Psychologist

Georgie Powell, Digital Wellbeing Expert, Former Googler, and Founder of Sentient Consulting

Joan Amorós, Psychologist and Founder of Desconnexions and Mobile Free Day

Josep Gaspar, Qustodio Co-founder and Gaming Expert

Like last year, when the pandemic was just beginning, and we were banging pots in solidarity for front-line workers, we want to give special **thanks to parents.** The pandemic turned many parents into front-line workers at home as full-time educators and care-givers on top of their usual careers. It has been a stressful year, and while 2021 is more hopeful, for many parents the juggling continues. For everything you do to keep your children safe online, and off, we thank you.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Insights on kids' app habits



1 **YouTube** is still the **#1** online video app by far, but its lead is shrinking with increased competition.



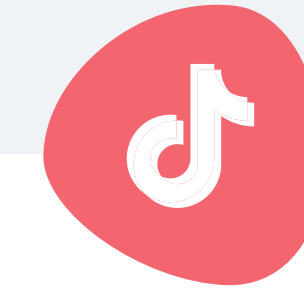
2 Kids spend nearly **50%** more time watching videos on **YouTube Kids** than on **Disney Plus**.



3 Parents block **YouTube Kids** the least, even though it is the online video app that kids use the most, **68 mins/day** on average.



4 Kids spent **76%** longer on **social media apps** in 2020 than in 2019 – the largest increase of any app category.



5 **TikTok** is the new king of social media: more popular than **Facebook** and **Instagram**, and played **97%** longer than in 2019.



6 **Facebook's** popularity rebounded among kids, but they still spent nearly **60 minutes longer** per day on average on **TikTok**.



7 **Roblox** is the most popular video game app, and the one kids play the longest: **96 mins/day** on average (up **23%**).



8 **Among Us** and **What Would You Choose Rather** went from unranked to among the most popular video game apps among kids worldwide, displacing Paper.io and Helix Jump.



9 **Fortnite** is losing some steam. Kids played this video game app nearly **20%** less than last year.



10 **Google Classroom** is the most popular education app globally, more than **3x** more popular than second place **Remind: School Communication**.



11 **WhatsApp** is the most popular communications app, but kids use **Zoom** **56%** longer.



12 **Discord's** popularity as a communication app grew **92%** among kids in 2020.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Tips for online safety & screen time

“

To protect children’s physical and mental health, make sure kids get physical activity at least 60 minutes a day”

Dr. Cecily Havert (Family Medicine)

“

To protect children from bullies, data thieves, pedophiles, fake news, dangerous challenges... I encourage parents to keep children off social media as long as possible. Kids’ brains aren’t ready for it.”

Maria Guerrero (Family Psychologist)

“

Video games can produce very negative consequences. If you see your child suffering from social isolation, drop in school performance, aggressiveness, avoidance, frustration ... letting them play video games is just not a good idea.”

Marc Masip (Psychologist and expert in addiction)

“

To keep kids off of inappropriate apps and truly understand the content of the games your kids play, setting up parental controls and occasional co-watching of online videos are a must.”

Dr. Nicole Beurkens (Holistic Psychologist)

“

Kids are digital natives, not digital experts. Parents need to educate and talk to their children about the many risks related to social media and life online, just as they would about dangers in the ‘real’ world.”

Georgie Powell (Digital Wellbeing expert)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

“

Because online games with chat functionality can be gateways to predators, parents need to be extra vigilant about who their kids are playing with and review game privacy settings. Friends are fine. But friends of friends are not.”

Josep Gaspar (Gaming expert)

“

To make sure sensitive information about your child is being used correctly, you should understand what data schools have about your children, how it is used and with whom it is shared.”

Malcolm Bain (Legal & Privacy expert)

“

Keep track of your child’s screen time with native or external parental controls and balance it with outdoor time on the weekend if you can’t fit it in during the week. When you can’t turn off your phone, turn off alerts, on your child’s chat apps, as well as your own. The first step in teaching your kids good habits is setting a good example yourself.”

Joan Amorós, (Founder of Desconnexions and Mobile Free Day)

“

To ensure proper social and neurological development and to lay a solid basis for learning, parents should ensure that kids get face-to-face instruction and are allowed to touch and explore every day. Give your child every opportunity to learn in an off-line way.”

Maria Guerrero (Family Psychologist)

“

Studies on schools that prohibit mobile phones in school consistently show: higher rates of concentration, lower rates of cyberbullying, and more chances for real social interaction and physical activity. To give your child these benefits, delay giving them a smartphone as long as possible.”

Marc Masip (Psychologist and expert in addiction)



Intro

Before 2020, Qustodio was already sounding the alarm about increasing levels of screen time among kids, and encouraging parents to play a larger role in helping their children cut back on device time and create healthy digital habits. We expected screen time had not reached its max and would continue to inch forward. But, what we didn't expect was the massive **100%** surge in online activity across every app category in the spring of 2020.

Those extreme levels of screen time activity were caused by and propelled by the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, which forced children and their entire lives indoors. Everything from education to play, socialization, and even exercise were forced online. And, as many parents desperately juggled work and childcare, the internet became the babysitter too. **Our kids were literally trapped behind screens.**

While we are lucky that coronavirus itself didn't harm the majority of children as severely as adults, the secondary effects of the resulting pandemic lockdowns, and its digitizing of their lives, could be just as harmful, and last longer. It may be decades before we know their full effect, especially on education. But, the latest research

already shows that greater use of digital devices if internet use is unsupervised [magnifies kids' risk of sexual exploitation and cyberbullying](#). Studies on excessive screen time from before Covid, already pointed to mental health issues and [lower psychological well-being](#) including anxiety and [depression](#), as well as to physical health issues including [eye fatigue](#) and [obesity](#).

The good news is that as 2020 went on, and as some kids were able to go back to school as restrictions lightened, our research showed that screen time levels did start to return to 'normal' pre-Covid levels. But screen time remained up **36%** on average for the entire year compared to 2019. And the times of day kids used apps continued to be strong throughout the day, instead of just after school until around 8pm or bedtime. The familiar, pre-Covid pattern from previous years had largely vanished. Suddenly, it was **screen time all the time**, with steady use from 10am to nearly 10pm across most app categories.

We don't expect the after-school peak, or many of the other changes to kids' screen time habits to fully recover in 2021. In fact, they may never be the same. But when it comes to technology, we

know that things can change fast. For example, two of the six most popular games of 2020, **Among Us** and **What Would You Do Rather** had no rank in 2019.

Fortunately, advice on how to help kids stay safe online and balance their screen time has stayed the same. With the insights and guidance in the pages of the report ahead, you'll be better able to understand what happened in 2020, and be ready for what we expect will still be **a very digital 2021**.



Online Video

What we found

Propelled by the need for entertainment during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns and by discounts from rivaling online video companies, 2020 was the year millions of families signed up for new or additional video services – [Netflix added 25 million new subscribers in the first half of 2020 alone](#). In terms of popularity in our analysis, this [streaming war](#) hurt dominant services like **YouTube** and helped new entrants like **Disney Plus** (launched in the US in 2019, and in the UK and Spain in 2020).

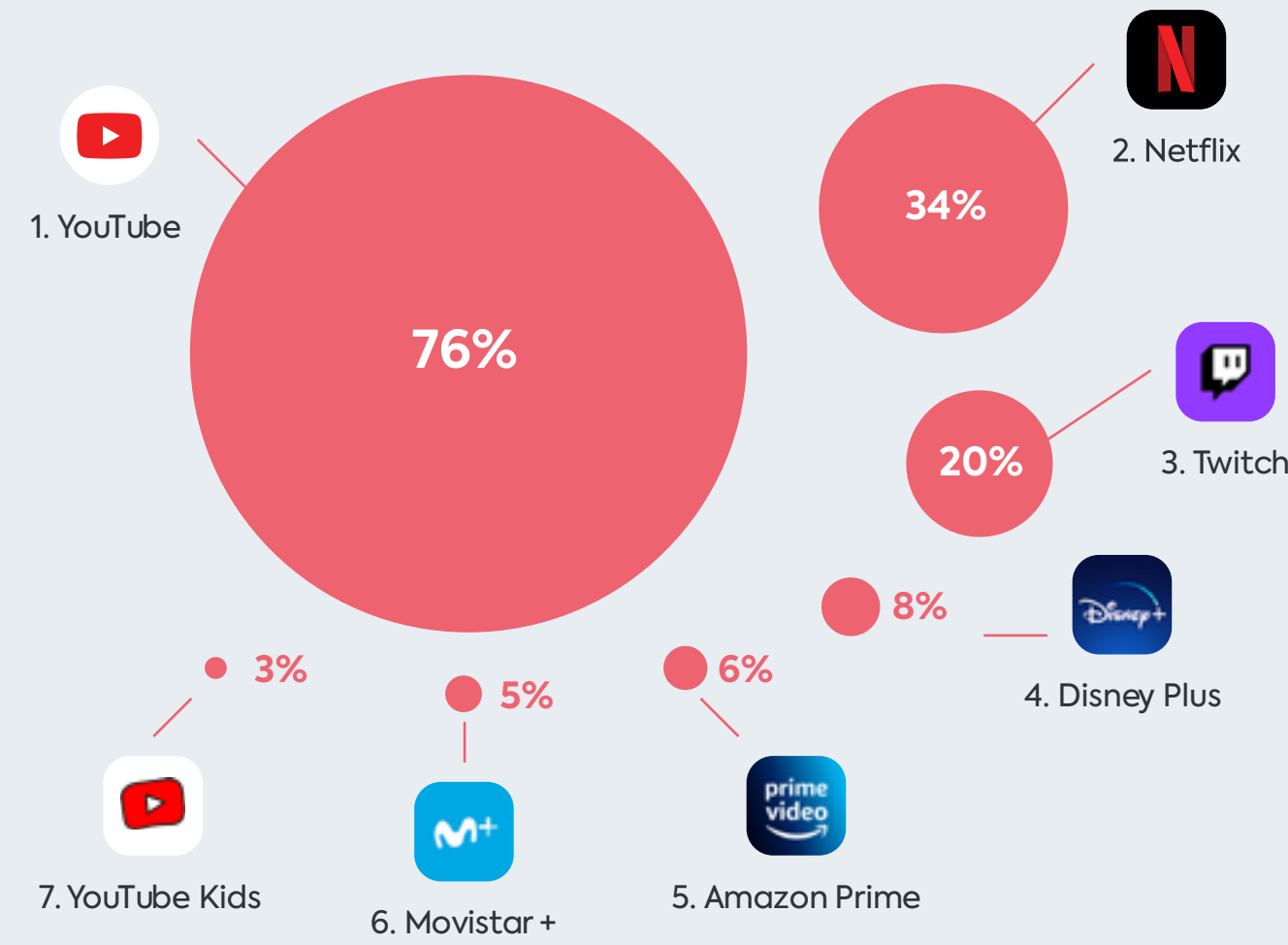
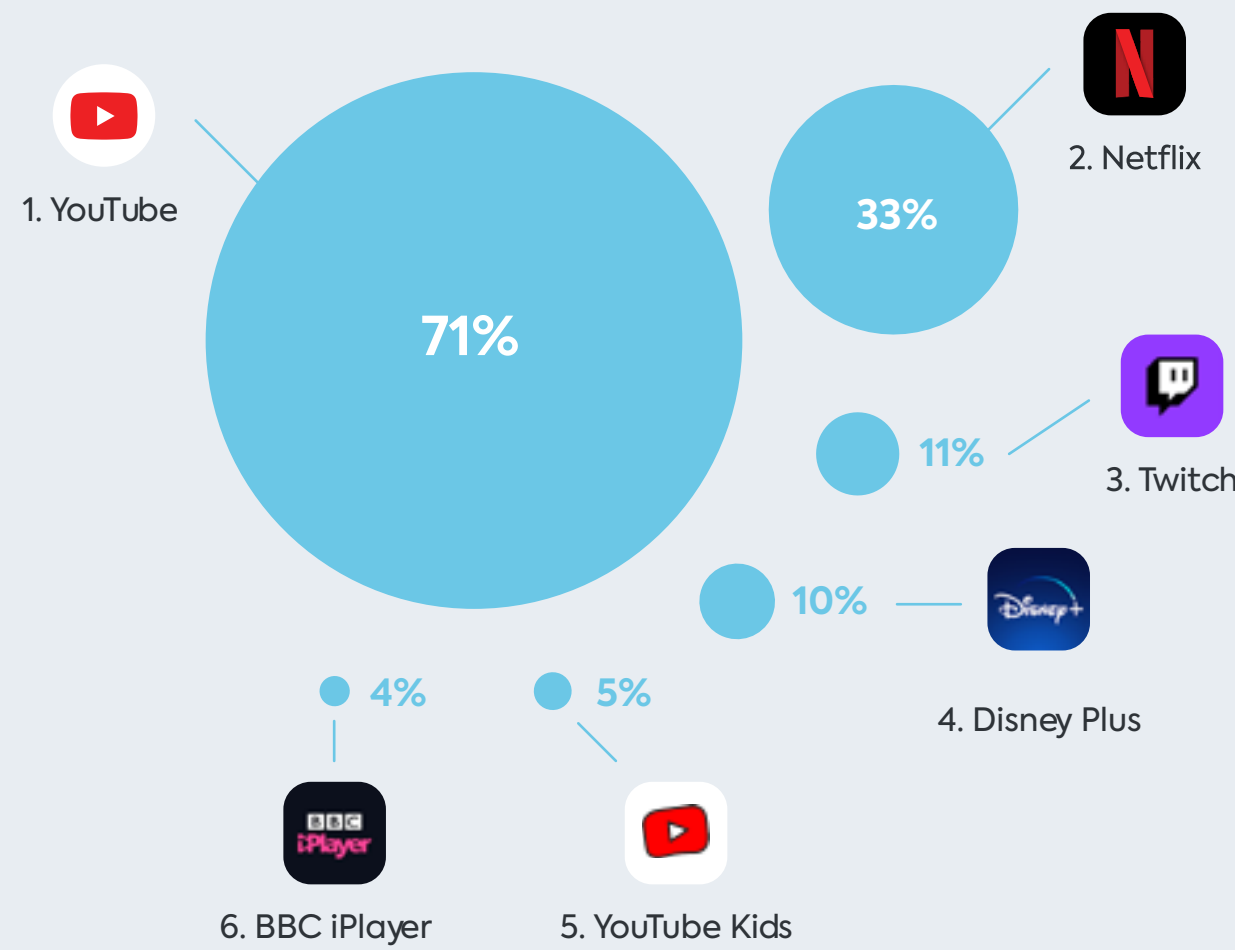
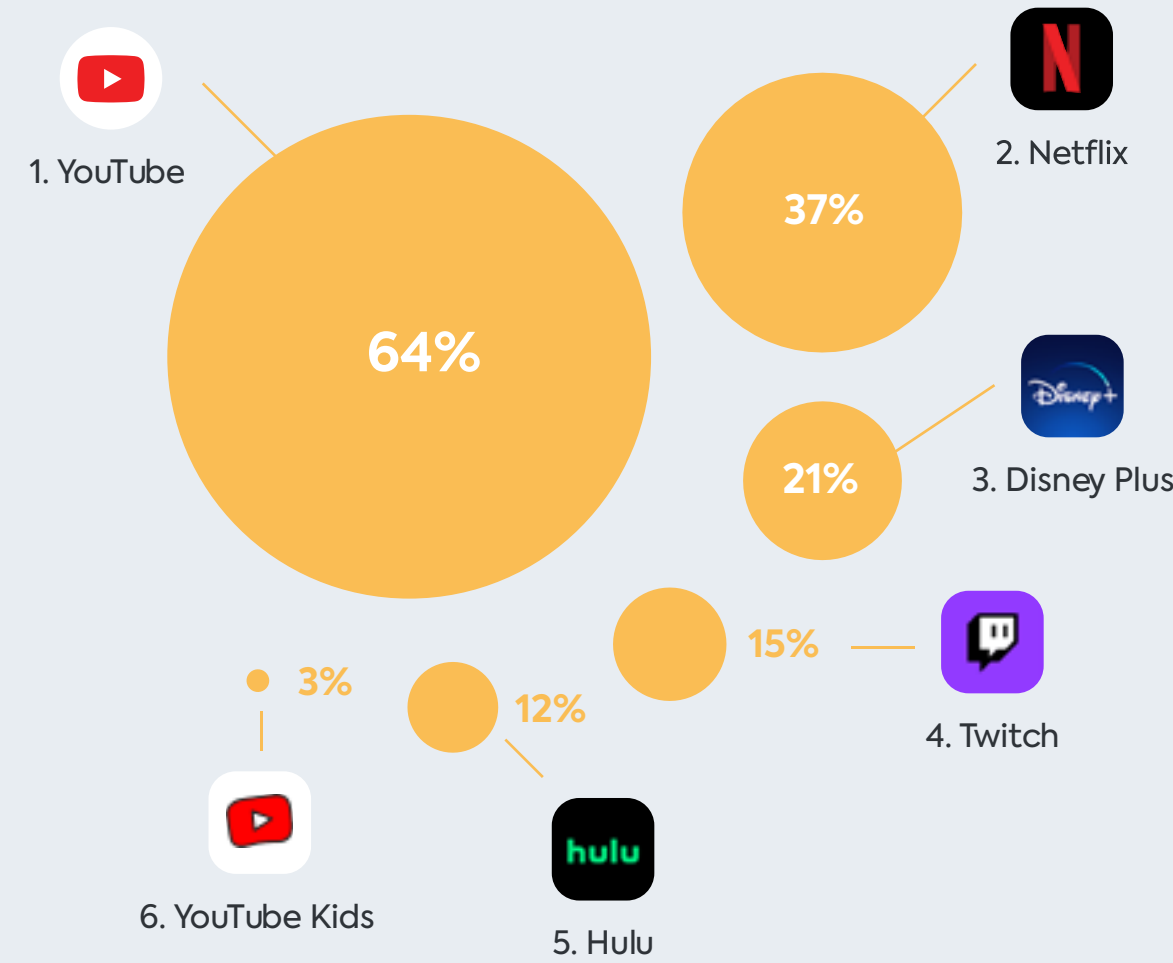
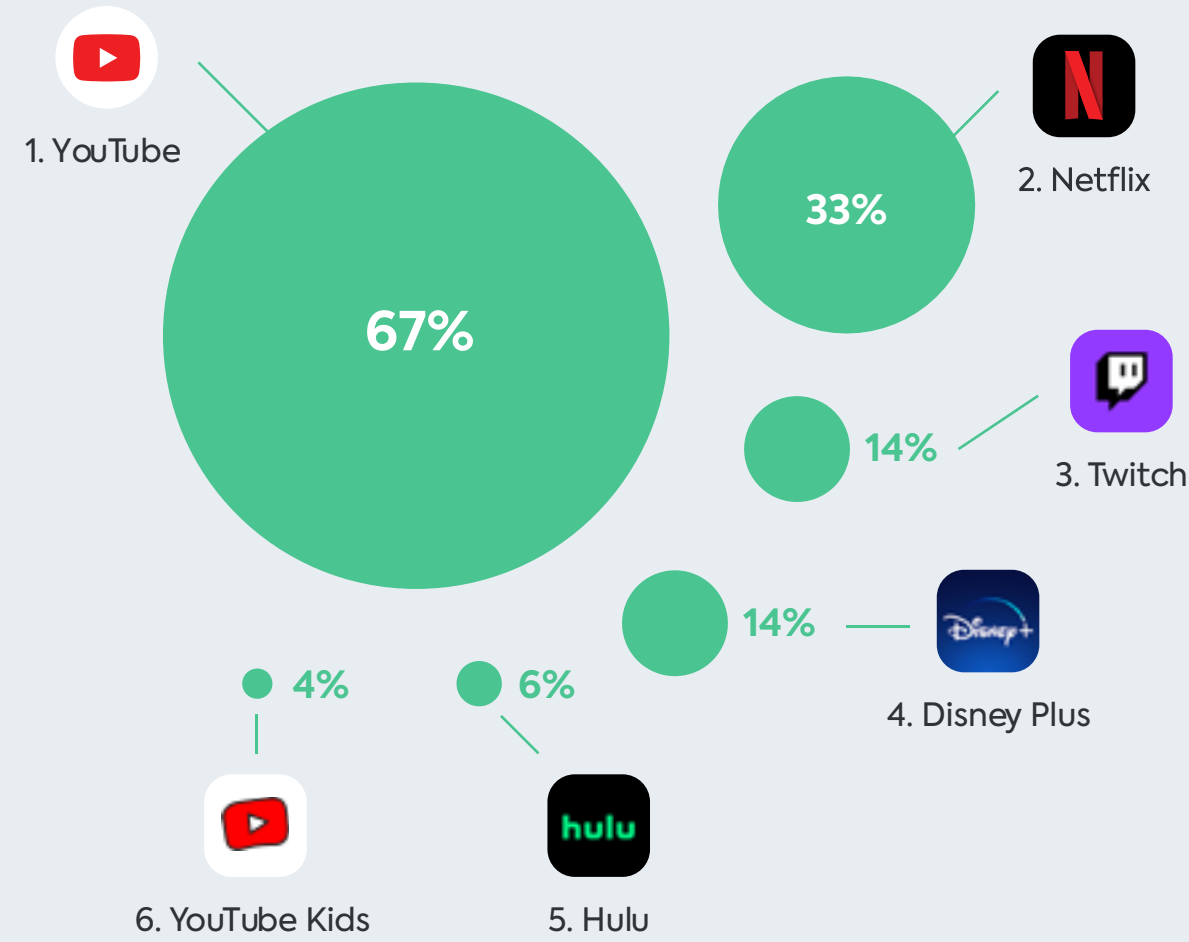
Just as online video subscriptions surged, so did the amount of time kids spent using them, up 25% on average for the year and peaking in the spring with the lockdowns. As restrictions relaxed later in the year, time on videos did too. But kids were still streaming videos via their apps throughout the day, not just in the peak after school hours like they did pre-Covid.

What were the most popular online video apps among kids?

YouTube continued to be the most popular online video app among kids by far, nearly twice as popular as its closest rival, **Netflix**. Nevertheless, YouTube and **YouTube Kids** popularity dropped globally and across all regions. **Netflix's** popularity remained stable globally and in the US, and grew **14%** in the UK and **21%** in Spain. Twitch had steady growth in all markets, especially in Spain where its popularity grew **150%**. But the star was **Disney Plus**. Unranked in 2019, by 2020 Disney Plus had become the third most popular app in the US and fourth globally, in the UK and Spain. Regional players such as **Hulu** in the US, **BBC iPlayer** in the UK and, and **Movistar+** in Spain, remained among the most popular apps of 2020.

Most popular online video apps (% of kids)

● GLOBAL ● US ● UK ● SPAIN



Global

2020

1.	YouTube	67%
2.	Netflix	34%
3.	Twitch	14%
4.	Disney Plus	14%
5.	Hulu	6%
6.	YouTube Kids	4%

2019

1.	YouTube	75%
2.	Netflix	34%
3.	Twitch	10%
4.	YouTube Kids	7%
5.	Amazon Prime	7%
6.	Hulu	5%

US

2020

1.	YouTube	64%
2.	Netflix	37%
3.	Disney Plus	21%
4.	Twitch	15%
5.	Hulu	12%
6.	YouTube Kids	3%

2019

1.	YouTube	71%
2.	Netflix	37%
3.	Twitch	11%
4.	Hulu	8%
5.	YouTube Kids	8%
6.	Amazon Prime	7%

UK

2020

1.	YouTube	71%
2.	Netflix	33%
3.	Twitch	11%
4.	Disney Plus	10%
5.	YouTube Kids	6%
6.	BBC iPlayer	4%

2019

1.	YouTube	75%
2.	Netflix	29%
3.	YouTube Kids	10%
4.	BBC iPlayer	9%
5.	Twitch	8%
6.	Amazon Prime	7%

Spain

2020

1.	Youtube	76%
2.	Netflix	34%
3.	Twitch	20%
4.	Disney Plus	8%
5.	Amazon Prime	6%
6.	Movistar +	5%
7.	YouTube Kids	3%

2019

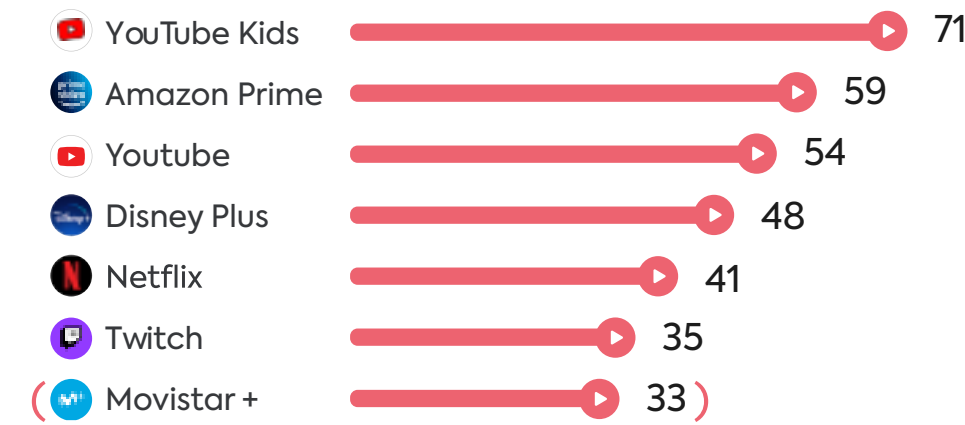
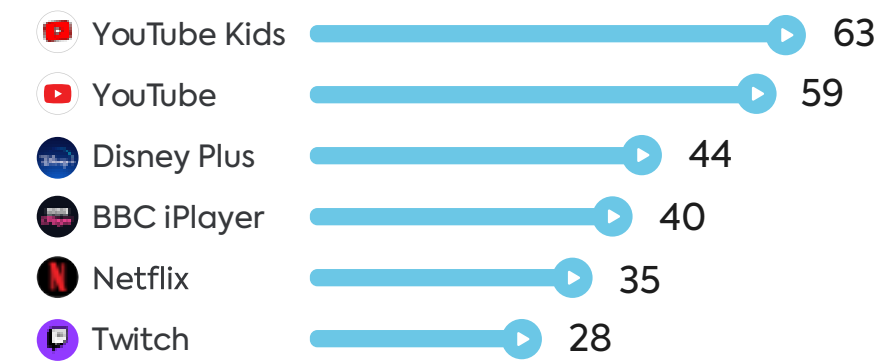
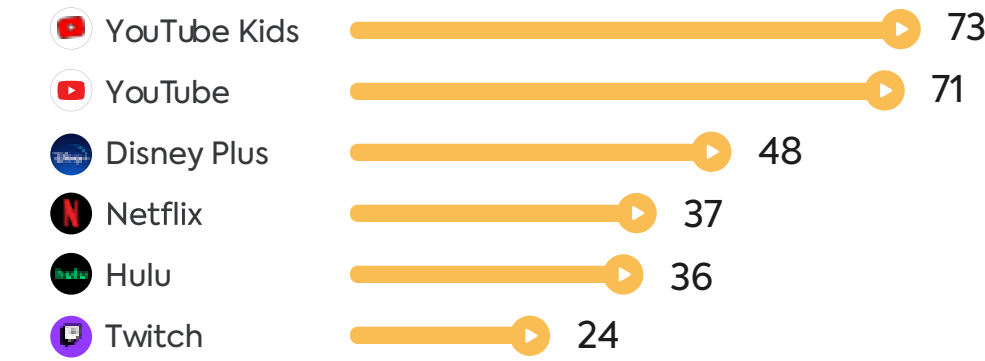
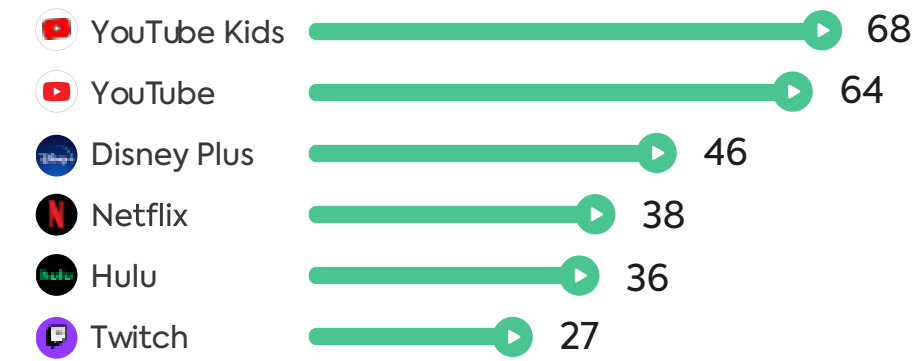
1.	YouTube	90%
2.	Netflix	28%
3.	Twitch	8%
4.	Movistar +	6%
5.	Disney Channel	4%
6.	Amazon Prime	4%
7.	YouTube Kids	4%

How much time did kids spend watching online video apps?

Despite **YouTube** and **YouTube Kids** drop in popularity, they were still the apps kids used to watch videos the longest. For example, they watched YouTube **40%** longer (and YouTube kids nearly **50%** longer) than **Disney Plus**, nearly **70%** longer than **Netflix**, nearly 80% longer than **Hulu**, and more than **100%** longer than **Twitch**. They also watched both YouTube and YouTube kids approximately **30%** longer in 2020 than they did in 2019.

Globally, kids spent an average of **45 mins/day** watching videos online. Children in the US watched the most, on average **48 mins/day**. In Spain, kids watched online videos the least, hitting as low as **24 mins/day** in December, a reflection of many kids being back to school in person in that region.

Time kids spent on the most popular online video apps (avg. mins/day)



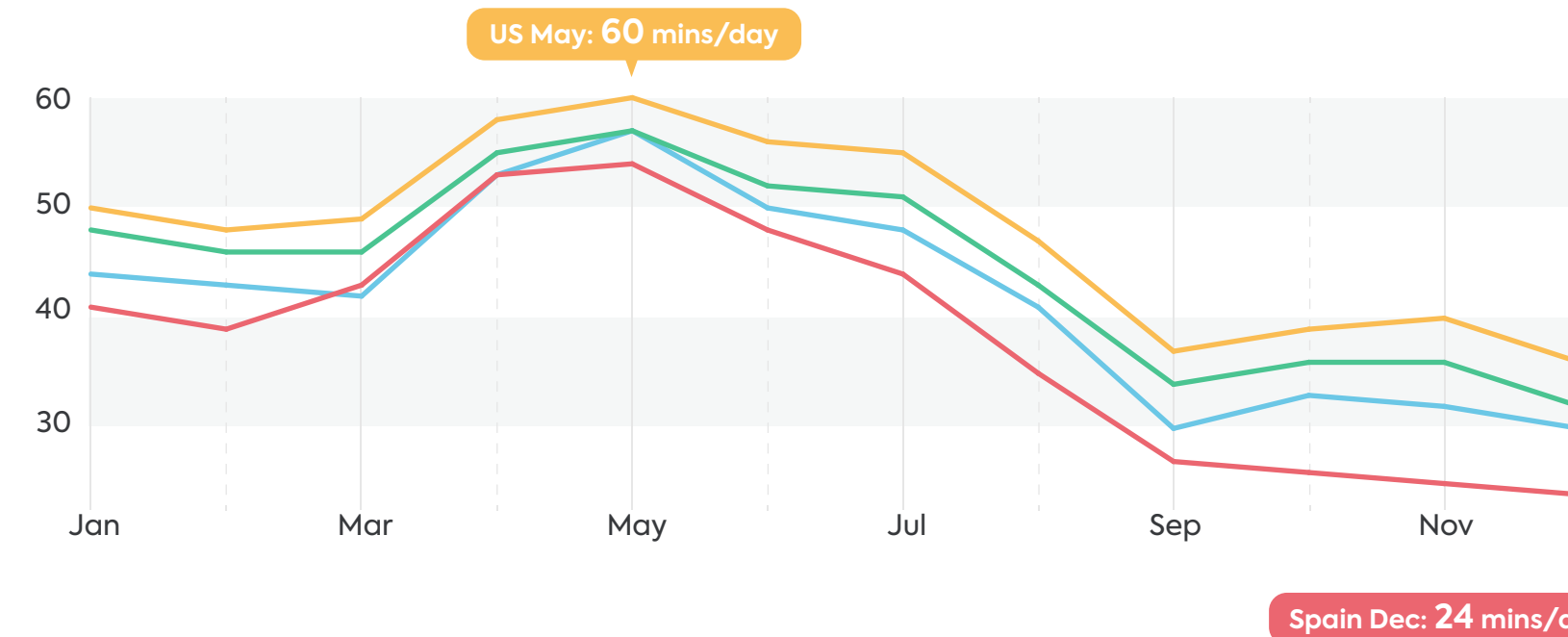
Global	2020	2019
1. Youtube Kids	68	52
2. Youtube	64	48
3. Disney Plus	46	28
4. Netflix	38	35
5. Hulu	36	15
6. Twitch	27	35

US	2020	2019
1. Youtube Kids	73	55
2. Youtube	71	63
3. Disney Plus	48	NA
4. Netflix	37	50
5. Hulu	36	42
6. Twitch	24	16

UK	2020	2019
1. Youtube Kids	63	50
2. Youtube	59	58
3. Disney Plus	44	NA
4. BBC iPlayer	40	27
5. Netflix	35	47
6. Twitch	28	12

Spain	2020	2019
1. Youtube Kids	71	38
2. Amazon Prime	59	33
3. Youtube	54	46
4. Disney Plus	48	NA
5. Netflix	41	42
6. Twitch	35	16
7. Movistar +	33	31

Time kids spent on online video apps in general (avg. mins/day)

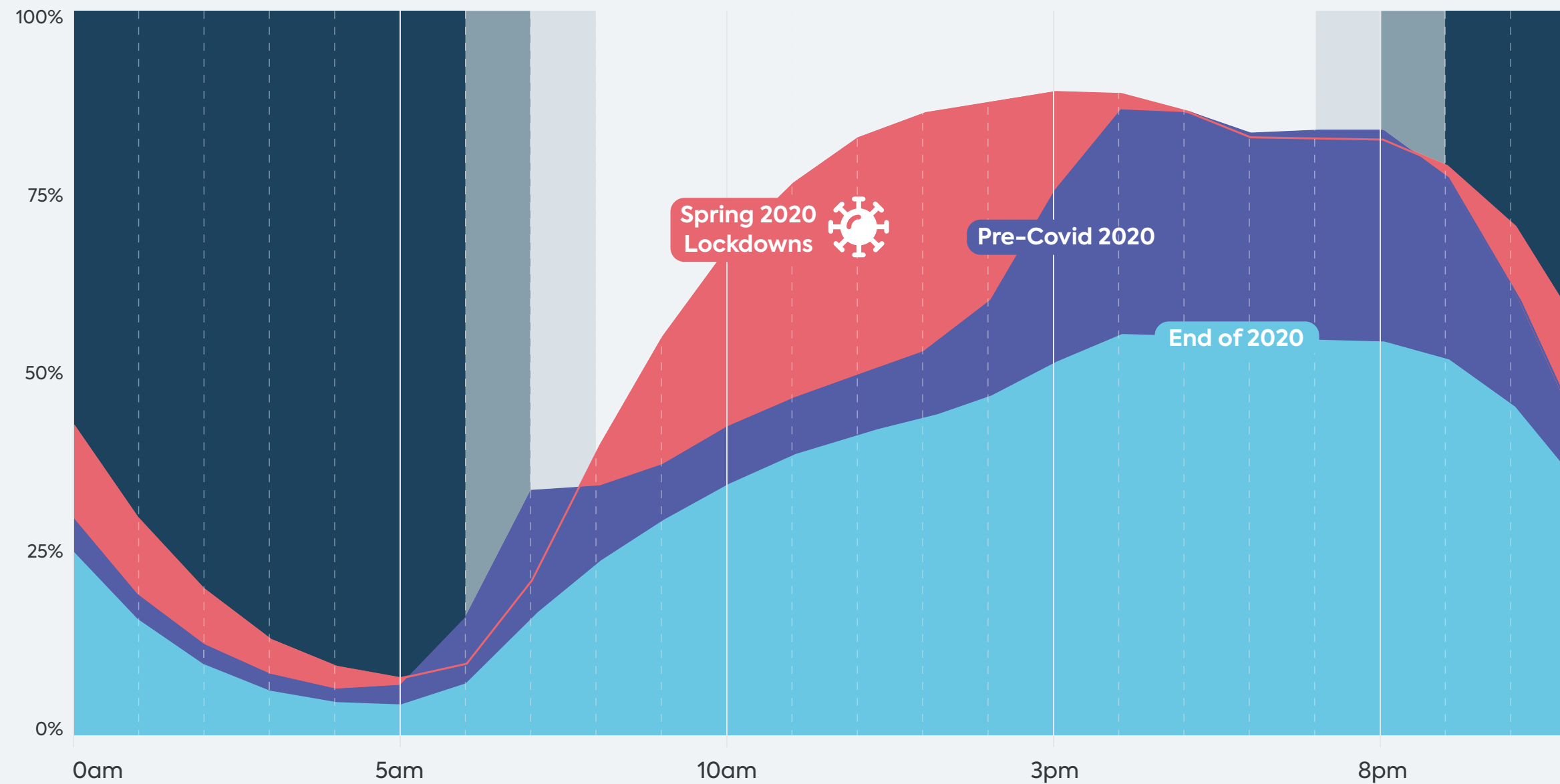


	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Ago	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Avg
Global	48	46	46	55	57	52	51	43	34	36	36	32	45
US	50	48	49	58	60	56	55	47	37	39	40	36	48
UK	44	43	42	53	57	50	48	41	30	33	32	30	42
Spain	41	39	43	53	54	48	44	35	27	26	25	24	38

What time of day did kids watch online videos?

Before the pandemic, kids used online video apps mostly between **3pm and 8pm**, the typical after school hours until bedtime. By the arrival of the Covid-19 lockdowns in the spring, those habits changed dramatically. Suddenly kids were watching videos the whole day, from **10am to 10pm**. By the end of the year, total activity was down, even lower than pre-Covid levels, but the **connected-all-day-long** pattern remained.

Times of day kids watched online video apps in general (% of kids)



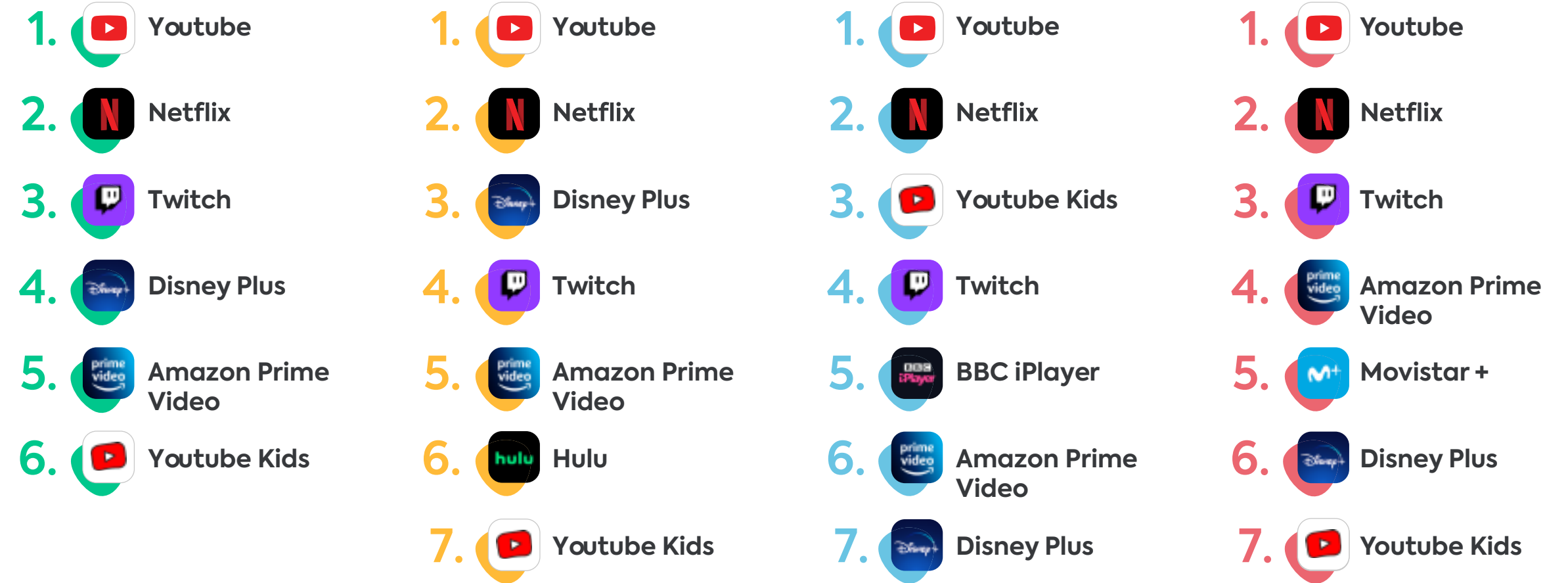
Which online video apps did parents block most?

In 2020, parents blocked the same online video as in 2019, with the exception of the **Disney Plus**. The new-comer in online video streaming jumped high onto the most blocked list, just as it did for popularity. Parents blocked **YouTube and Netflix** more than any other online video app. Surprisingly, parents blocked **YouTube Kids** the least, despite it being the online video app kids spent the most time on. Parents in every region were also likely to block **Twitch**, a video app that received press in July when a [teenager emptied \\$20,000 out of his mothers bank account](#) to buy virtual goods and make donations to various Twitch streamers.

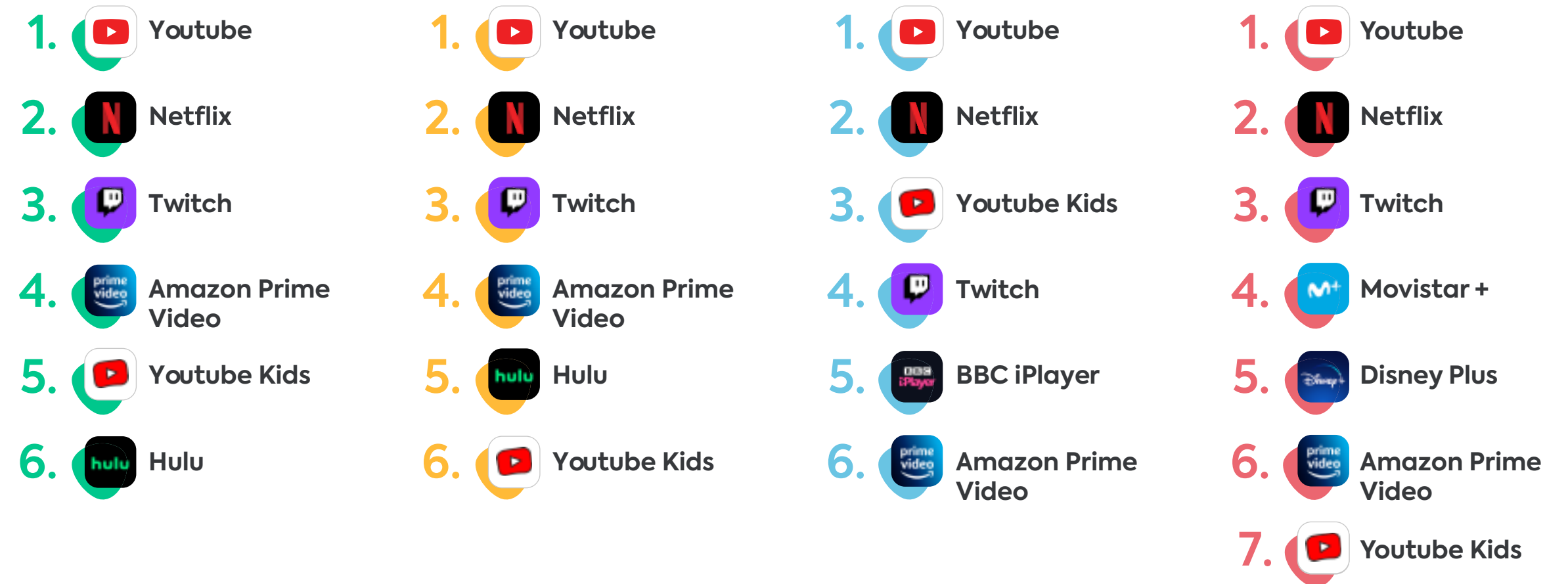
Most blocked online video apps (% of parents)

● GLOBAL ● US ● UK ● SPAIN

2020



2019



What we expect

In 2021, we expect the streaming wars to continue. As a result, **YouTube's** lead in online video will likely continue to diminish. We also expect each of the most popular apps in our list to look more and more like each other. **Amazon**-owned live-streaming **Twitch** will have more static content like YouTube, and YouTube will become more 'Twitch-like'. **Disney Plus** recently added parental control based on age and verification making it more similar to the **Netflix** model.

In terms of time watching videos, as long as kids aren't in school in person, we expect that all-day-long curve of connectedness to continue. Nevertheless, we don't expect to see the massive peak in online video we saw with the Covid-19 lockdowns in the spring, because time learning online will take away at least some of the time from viewing online.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone's screen is filled with a solid red color, and the white YouTube play button logo is centered on the screen. The person is wearing a grey, textured knit sweater. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be another person's shoulder and hair.

We expect that
all-day-long curve
of connectedness
to continue

What we recommend

While native parental controls for online video apps are improving, especially in the online video sector, they are still pretty minimal and change frequently, and can be hard to keep track of as you jump from one service to another. Also, even the best machine learning combined with human reviewing, cannot catch all inappropriate content, including images that may upset your child, material directed at adults, inaccurate information or fake news, and any content that might lead or tempt your child into unlawful or dangerous behavior. For greater control and stability, we recommend parents use independent parental controls in combination with native controls. On YouTube itself, parents should have their children use a Family Account, turn on Restricted Mode, and Lock Safety Mode. And, no matter which online video app parents use, there is no replacement for co-watching video content together with your children.

In regards to how much time parents should let their children spend watching online videos, it depends on many factors: the child's age, maturity, **digital resilience** (how well they can cope with online threats if they occur), how much time they spend doing other activities including school online, what kind of content

they are watching, how susceptible they are to addictive behavior and so on. If your child has been online all day, we recommend no screen time during the week after school unless it is needed for homework. Save online video watching for the weekend, and whenever possible watch videos together as a family.

Dr. Cecily Dvorak Havert, Primary Care Physician Board Certified in Family Medicine, reminds parents **“to protect children’s physical and mental health, make sure kids get physical activity at least 60 minutes a day.** That children, especially young kids, are spending more than that amount of time day watching online videos is concerning, especially if that is in addition to other kinds of screen time, or replacing exercise.“

Dr. Nicole Beurkens, holistic family psychologist, worries slightly less about the time and more about the video content itself. “Parents often don’t realize the harm that unintended exposure to violent or sexual content can cause their children. And, whenever live-streaming is involved, like on **Twitch**, anything is possible including inappropriate language, images, and scams, to name a few. Just because those activities are against app guidelines doesn’t

mean they don’t happen – that’s why to keep kids off of inappropriate apps and truly understand the content of the games your kids play, **setting up parental controls and occasional co-watching of online videos are a must.”**

“Whenever live-streaming is involved, like on Twitch, anything is possible including inappropriate language, images, and scams, to name a few”

Dr. Nicole Beurkens, holistic family psychologist



Social Media



What we found

2020 was the year of **TikTok** in so many ways – [India banned it](#), the [US threatened to ban it](#), and the [EU launched a probe](#) into its use of minor’s information. All the while, TikTok’s popularity grew worldwide, almost hitting the coveted **1 billion active user** mark ([with twice as many downloads](#)). TikTok was also the clear favorite among kids in our research, except for in one place, the US, where **Facebook** made an interesting comeback, rebounding from fourth place in 2019.

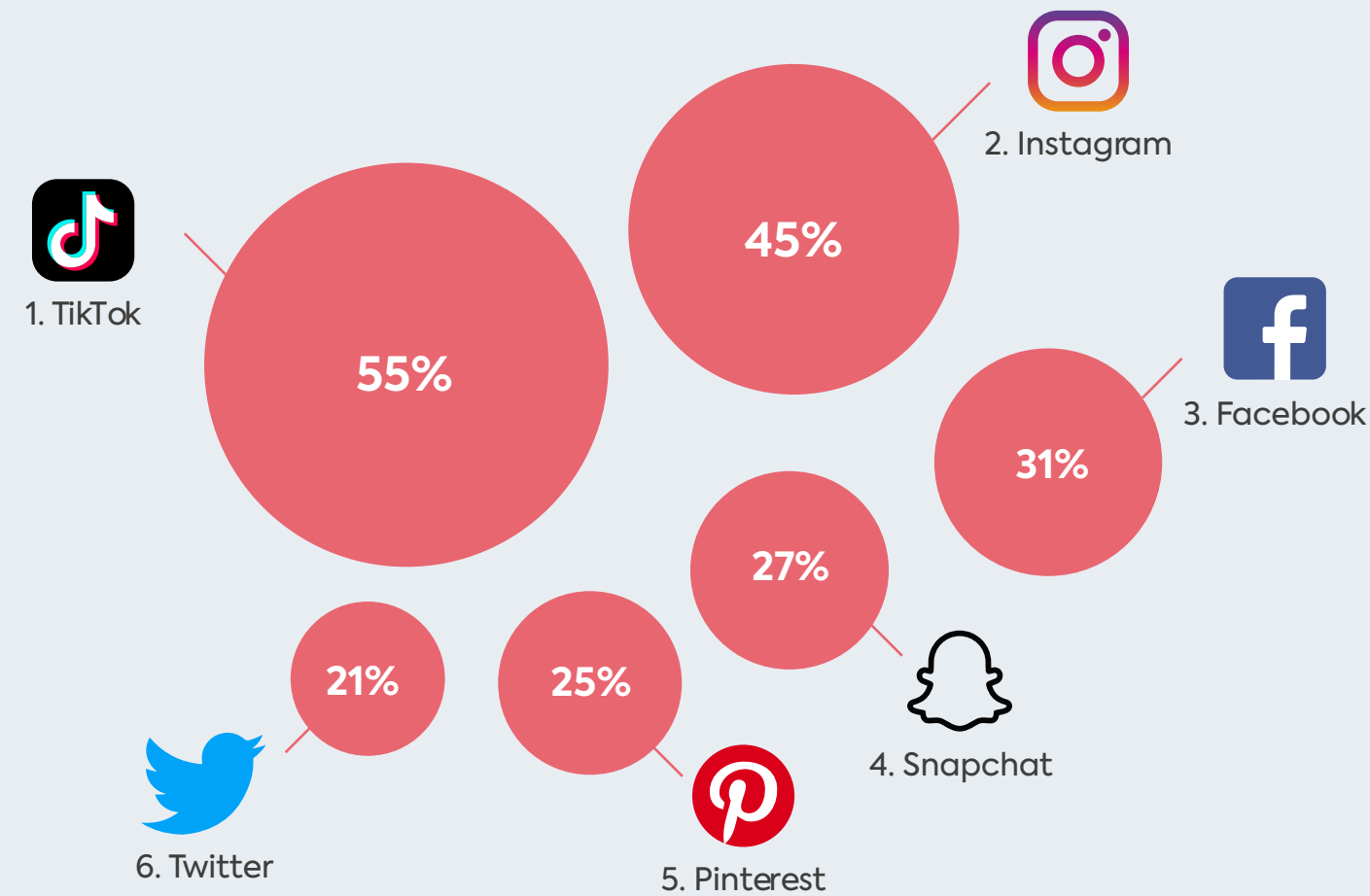
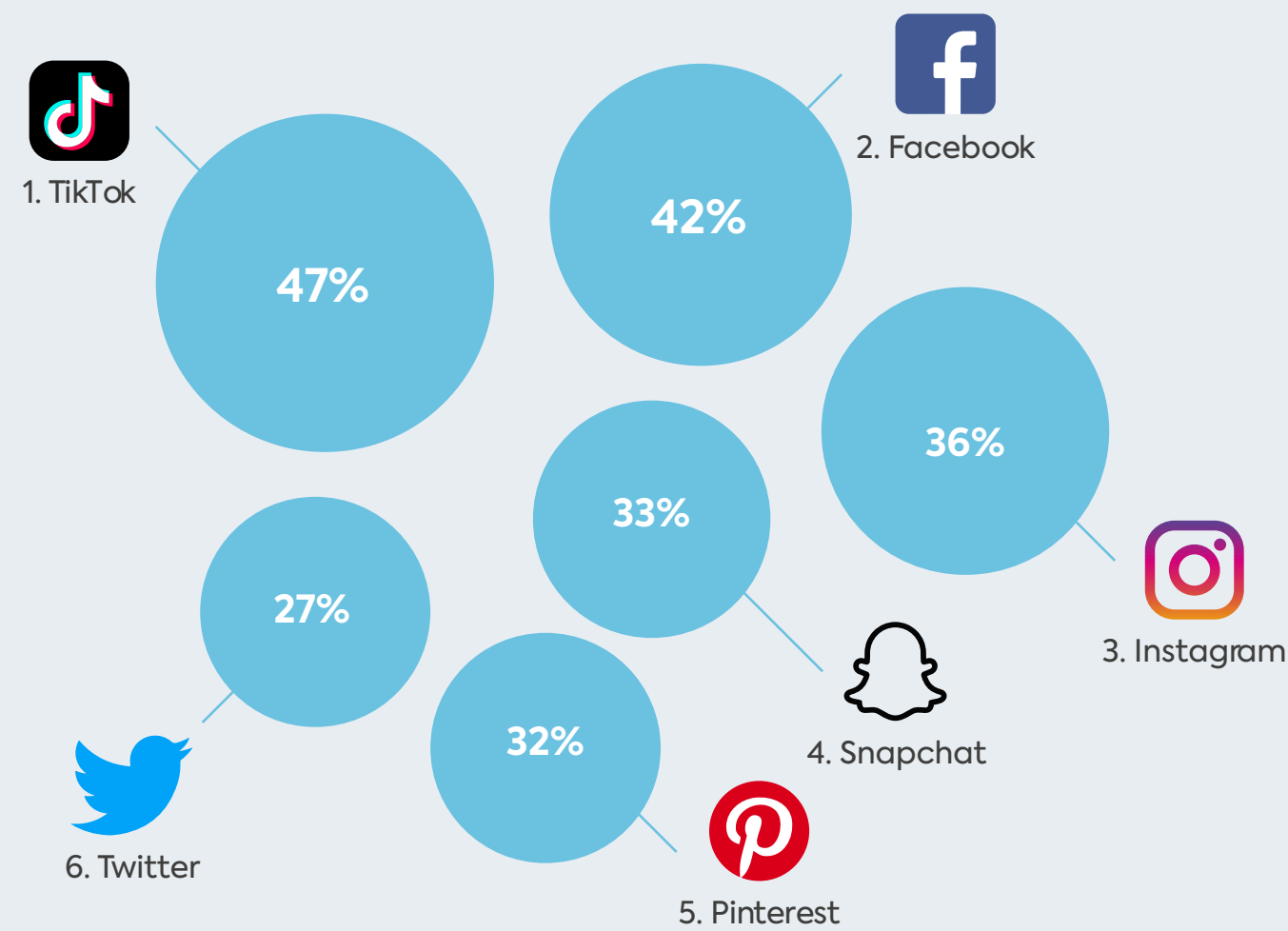
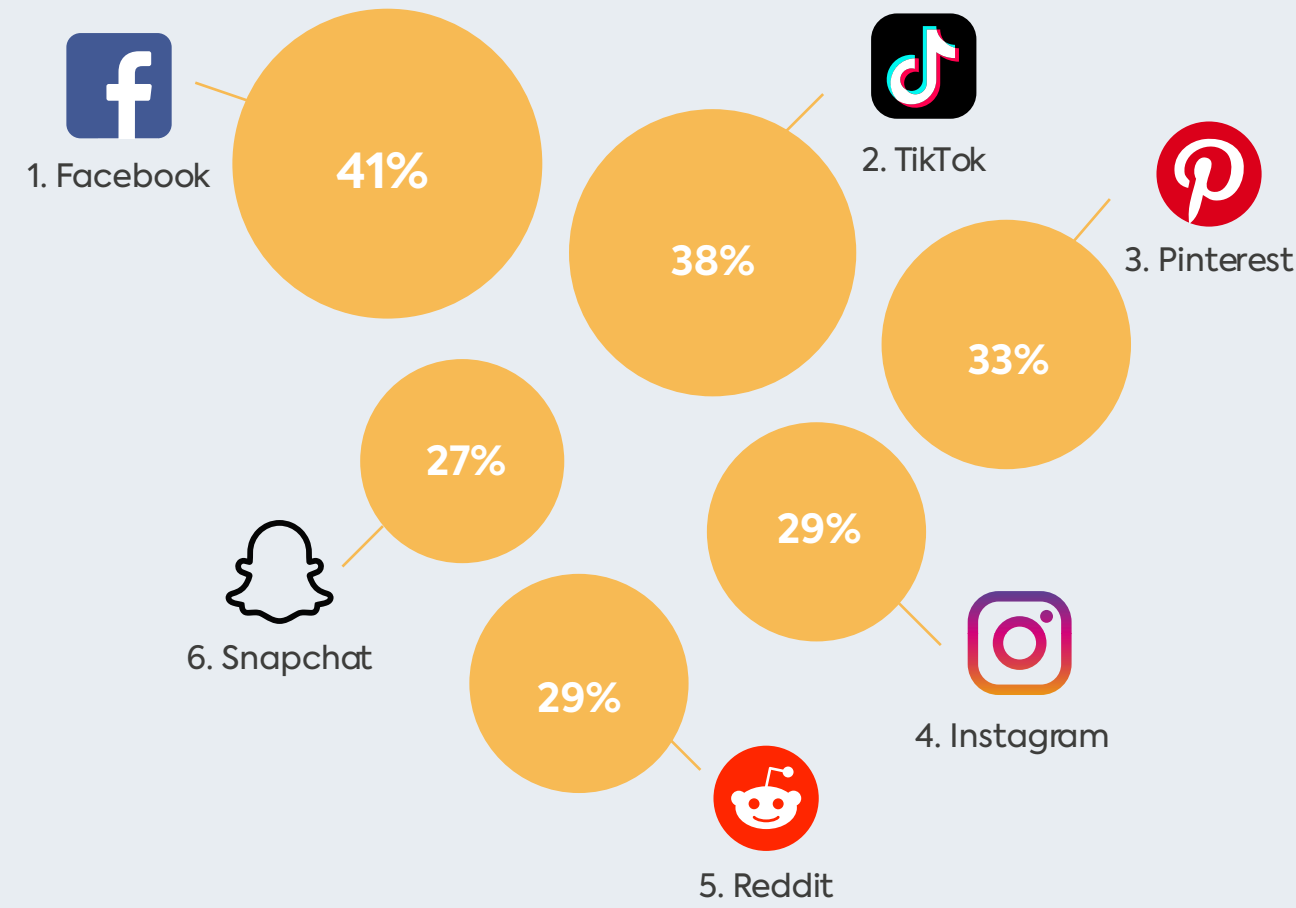
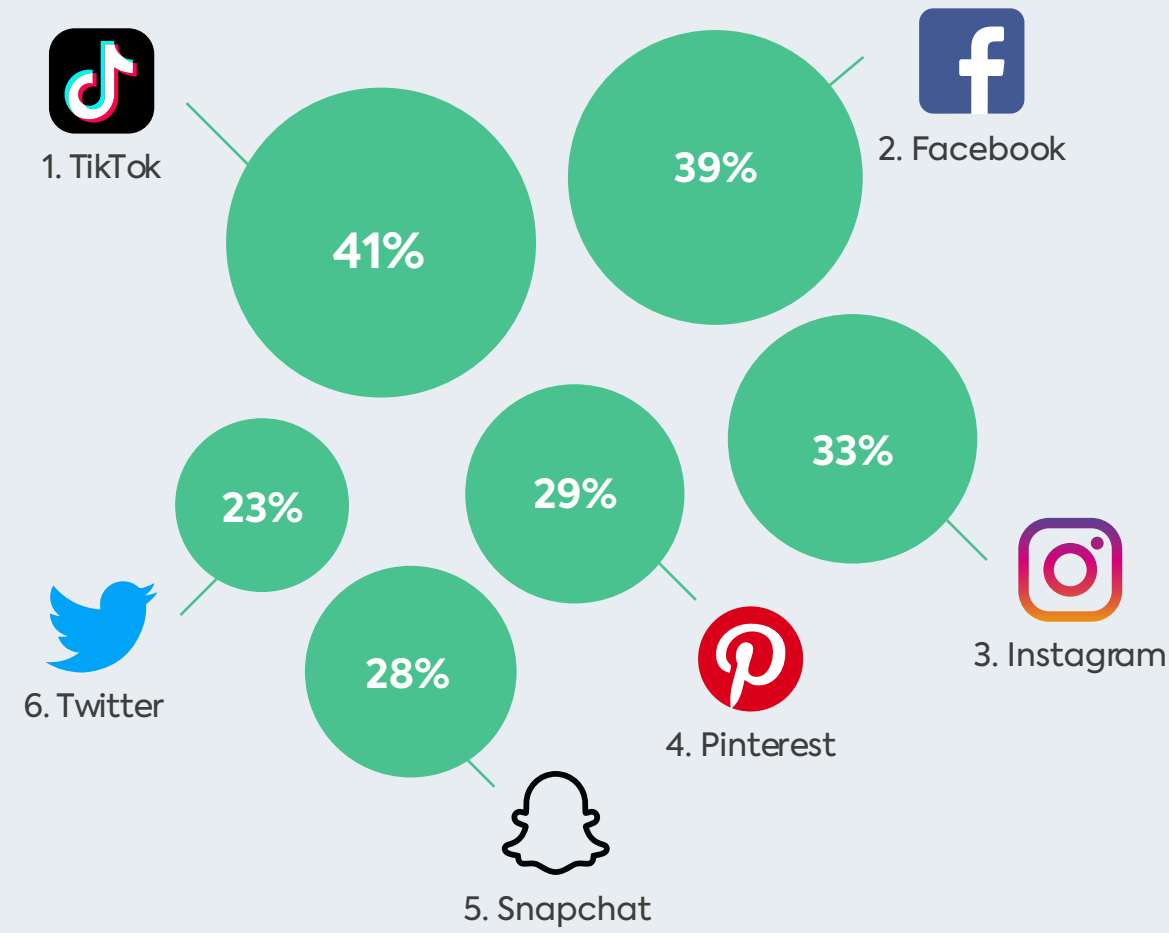
Covid-19 restrictions led to a surge in the use of social media apps in the spring and erased the typical after-school peak for their use. By the end of the year, the pre-covid pattern started to return, but still with close to half of kids connecting to social media throughout the entire day. For the entire year, average time on social media apps was **76%** higher than in 2019, the highest increase for any app category.

What were the most popular social media apps?

Kids everywhere, except the US, used **TikTok** more than any other social media app, replacing **Instagram**, the most popular social media app among kids in 2019, and ahead of **Facebook**. Globally, Instagram’s popularity dropped **43%**. We expected TikTok to take the top spot this year, but what surprised us most was Facebook’s rise to the number one spot in the US and its recovery in all other markets.

Most popular social media apps (% of kids)

● GLOBAL ● US ● UK ● SPAIN



Global

2020

1. TikTok 41%
2. Facebook 39%
3. Instagram 33%
4. Pinterest 29%
5. SnapChat 28%
6. Twitter 23%

2019

1. Instagram 58%
2. TikTok 45%
3. SnapChat 41%
4. Facebook 29%
5. Pinterest 21%
6. Twitter 10%

US

2020

1. Facebook 41%
2. TikTok 38%
3. Pinterest 33%
4. Instagram 29%
5. Reddit 29%
6. SnapChat 27%

2019

1. Instagram 20%
2. TikTok 16%
3. SnapChat 16%
4. Facebook 12%
5. Pinterest 9%
6. Houseparty 4%

UK

2020

1. TikTok 47%
2. Facebook 42%
3. Instagram 36%
4. SnapChat 33%
5. Pinterest 32%
6. Twitter 27%

2019

1. Instagram 25%
2. SnapChat 19%
3. TikTok 19%
4. Facebook 12%
5. Pinterest 6%
6. Twitter 5%

Spain

2020

1. TikTok 55%
2. Instagram 45%
3. Facebook 31%
4. SnapChat 27%
5. Pinterest 25%
6. Twitter 21%

2019

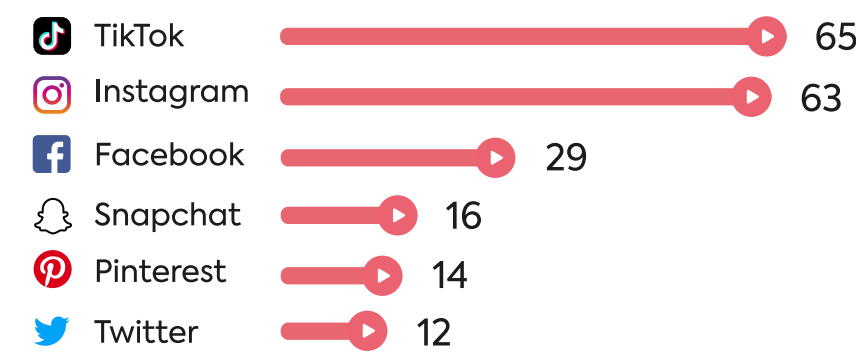
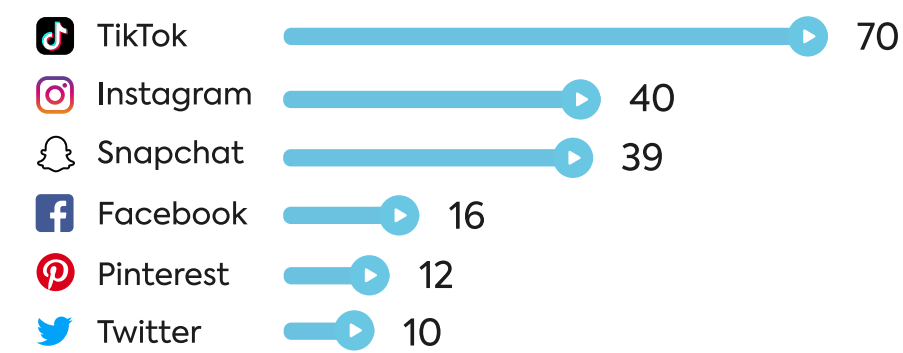
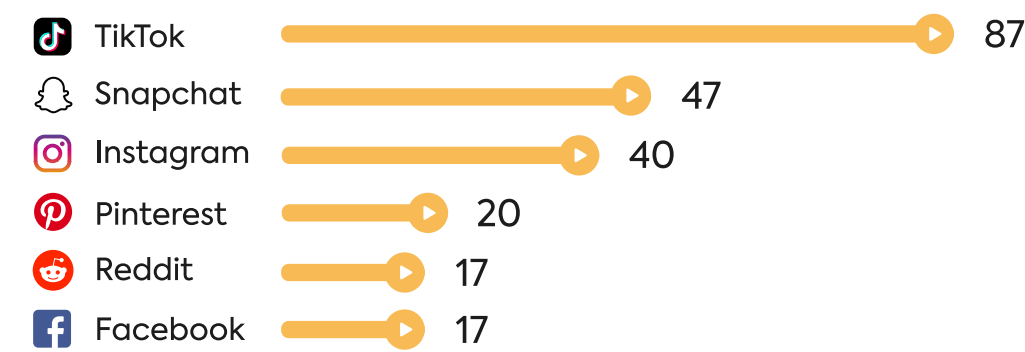
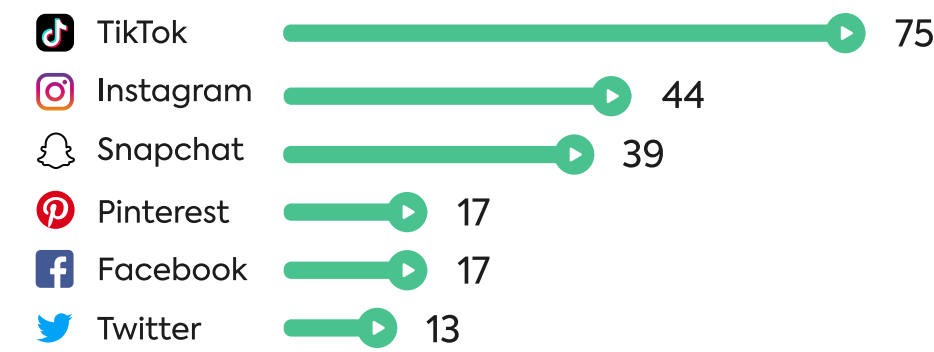
1. Instagram 49%
2. TikTok 34%
3. SnapChat 25%
4. Facebook 13%
5. Pinterest 10%
6. Twitter 6%

How much time did kids spend on social media?

TikTok was not only the most popular social media app among kids, it was also the app they used the longest - **75 mins/day** globally, up nearly **100%** from 2019. Compared to **Instagram**, kids used TikTok **31 minutes** longer. Despite **Facebook's** comeback in popularity among kids in our research, it was the app kids spent the least amount of time on, just **17 mins/day** on average: nearly **1 hour** less than on TikTok, **27 mins/day** less than on Instagram, and **22 mins/day** less than on **SnapChat**.

Kids used **social media apps most in May** across all regions. In a normal year, the peak would come much later, in October. As with every app category, we attribute this early spring peak to the Covid effect. On average, Kids in Spain spent the most time on social media apps, up **45%** more in May, during the peak of the pandemic lockdowns, compared to January.

Time kids spent on the most popular social media apps (avg. mins/day)



Global

	2020	2019
1. TikTok	75	38
2. Instagram	44	39
3. Snapchat	39	29
4. Pinterest	17	20
5. Facebook	17	17
6. Twitter	13	12

US

	2020	2019
1. TikTok	87	44
2. Snapchat	47	37
3. Instagram	40	40
4. Pinterest	20	23
5. Reddit	17	24
6. Facebook	17	18

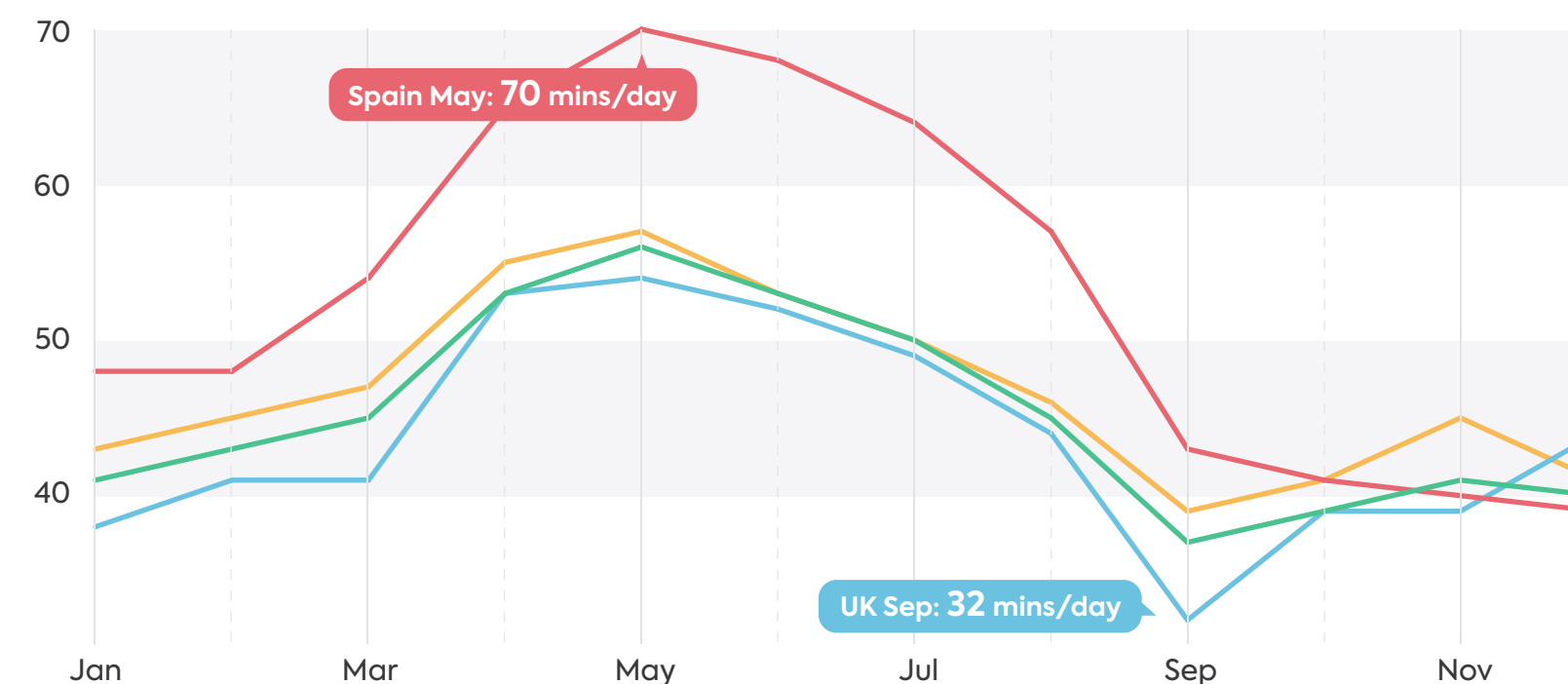
UK

	2020	2019
1. TikTok	70	37
2. Instagram	40	32
3. Snapchat	39	25
4. Facebook	16	18
5. Pinterest	12	17
6. Twitter	10	8

Spain

	2020	2019
1. TikTok	65	31
2. Instagram	63	48
3. Facebook	29	11
4. Pinterest	16	14
5. Snapchat	14	7
6. Twitter	12	11

Time kids spent on social media apps in general (avg. mins/day)

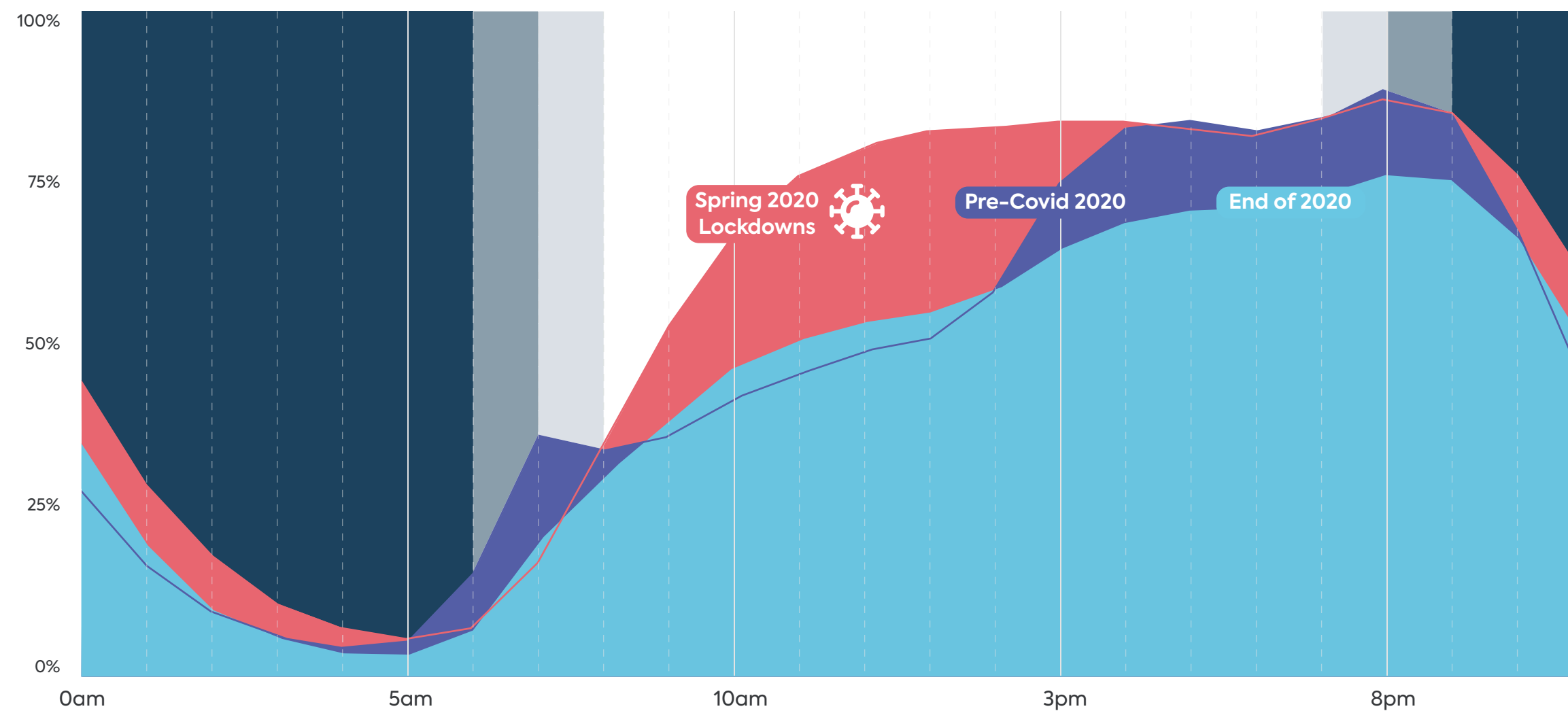


	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Avg
Global	41	43	45	53	56	53	50	45	47	39	41	40	45
US	43	45	47	55	57	53	50	46	39	41	45	41	47
UK	38	41	41	53	54	52	49	44	32	39	39	44	44
Spain	48	48	54	65	70	68	64	57	43	41	40	39	53

What time of day did kids use social media?

As in other app categories, before the pandemic, kids used social media apps mostly after school, between 3pm and 8pm. With the arrival of the pandemic restrictions, that 5-hour window was replaced with **13-hours** of high social media app use from 10am to 11pm. By the end of the year, the after-school peak started to recover, but the higher volumes of kids being connected throughout the day remained.

Times of day kids used social media apps in general (% of kids)

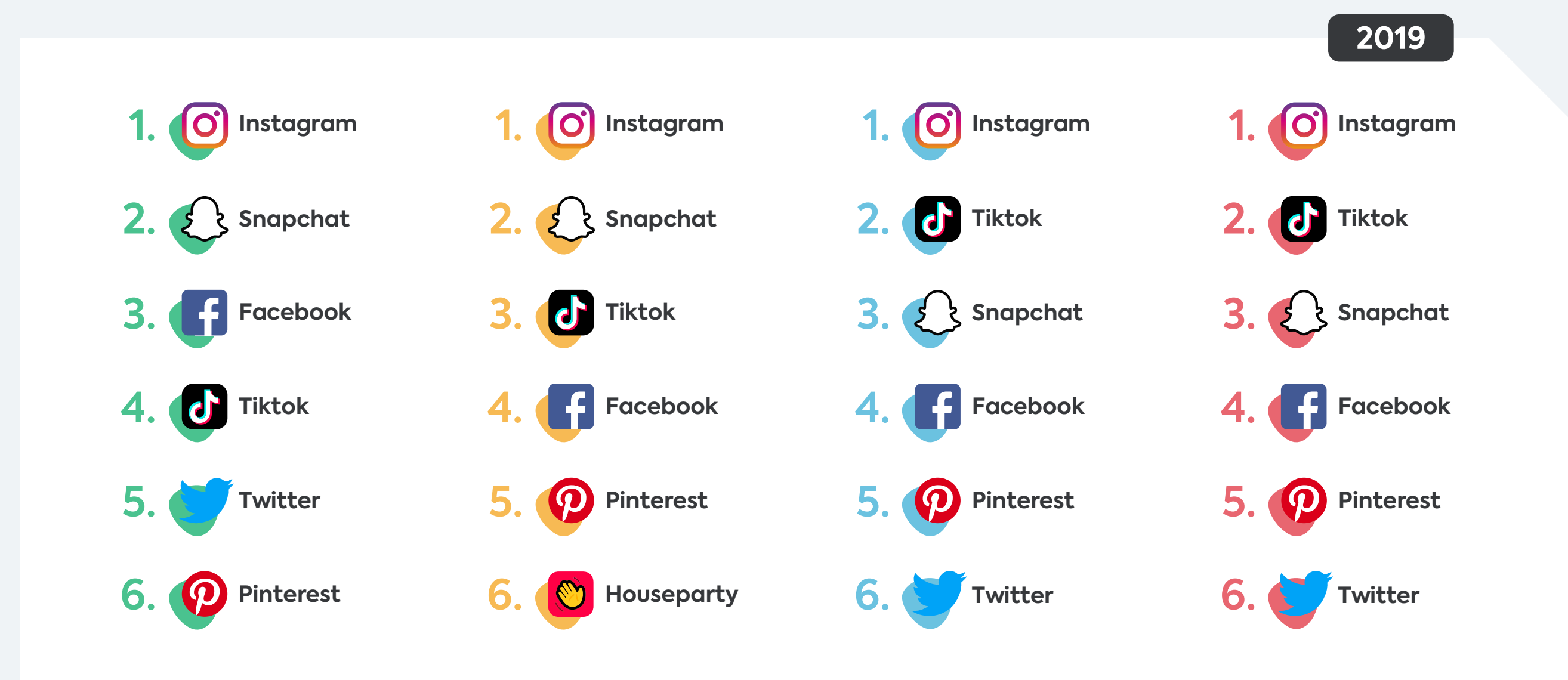
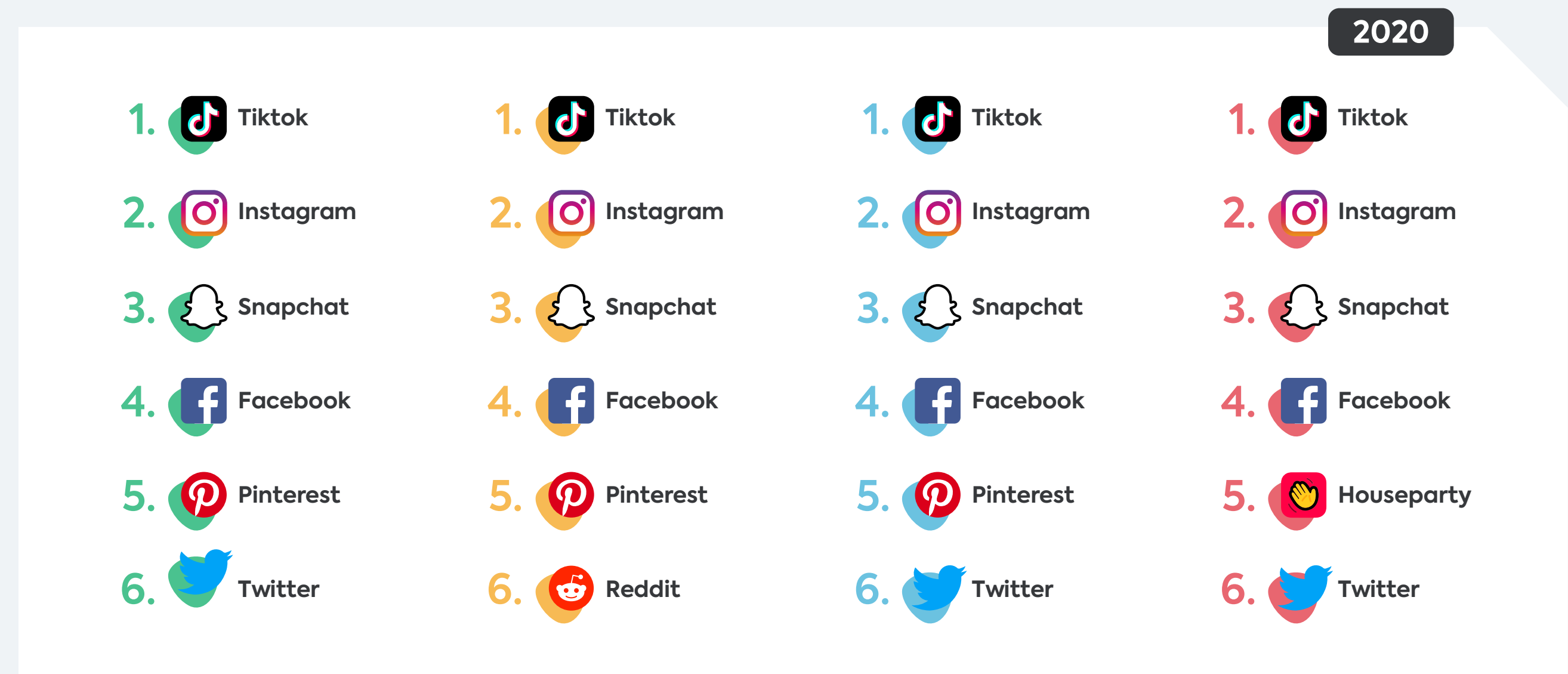


Which social media apps did parents block most?

Call it the curse of popularity, just as **TikTok** became the most used social media app for kids in 2020, it also rose to become the most blocked by parents globally and across all regions. **Instagram**, last year's leader, came in second, bumping **SnapChat** to third and **Facebook** to fourth across tall markets.

Most blocked social media apps (% of parents)

● GLOBAL ● US ● UK ● SPAIN



What we expect

In 2021, we expect **TikTok** to remain the most popular social media app among kids. Nevertheless, as it [remains under scrutiny](#) for data privacy, we also expect it to remain the top blocked social media app. We don't expect **Facebook** to hold onto its lead over **Instagram** (which it owns). We also expect all the major social media platforms to put a greater focus on content for kids and how to keep them safe, such as the recently announced plans to create an [Instagram for kids](#).

As kids go back to school, and Covid-19 restrictions lighten, we expect children to also go back to connecting less during schooltime hours. But, as kids are still allowed to bring mobile devices to school, kids will still be checking in between classes and at the lunch hour, even with their friends sitting right next to them.



What we recommend

One thing we hear again and again is how kids today don't make a distinction between the digital world and the 'real world'. And when it comes to social media, banning it from these kids would be like cutting off an arm. In other words, Social media is a very important part of their lives. And while there are minimum age requirements on app use, children will find a way to use them.

For many kids, social media is harmless and even a positive outlet for socialization and creativity. What's key, is that parents become very familiar with the platforms their children are using and who they are following. Sit together with your child and set up the proper privacy controls (**turn off location settings, limit connections to friends and family only**). Talk about the influencers they are following and why.

Also, talk to your child about online risks. Remind them to think twice before they post, to avoid future embarrassment, regret, and identity theft. Finally, decide together how much time they will be allowed to spend on social media. Then stick to it.

Maria Guerrero, Family Psychologist, reminds parents that "self harm and even suicides are

on the rise among kids and teens. The research continues, but non-stop pressure to be liked and perfect coupled with exposure to dangerous content or challenges on social media may be partly to blame. To protect children from bullies, data thieves, pedophiles, fake news, dangerous challenges, **I encourage parents to keep children off social media as long as possible. Kids' brains aren't ready for it.** But no matter what their age, it's never too early for parents to teach their children 'netiquet'—being nice online and not saying something you'll later regret — and about the many risks online and how to react when they strike."

Georgie Powell, Digital Wellbeing expert, says, "**Digital resilience is key.** It will equip our children with the skills to recognise risk and emotional harm, to recover from difficulties and upsets, and to find balance and perspective in both the on and offline worlds.

Unfortunately online risks are on the rise. Whether it is the challenge of managing screen time, notifications and our own online behaviour, to navigating the challenges of fake news, online bullying or predators, our children need to be equipped with the skills to navigate this world. Kids are digital natives, not digital

experts. Parents need to **educate and talk to their children** about the many risks related to social media and life online, just as they would about dangers in the 'real' world."

“I encourage parents to keep young children off social media completely. Kids' brains aren't ready for it”

Maria Guerrero
Family Psychologist



Gaming



What we found

Except for **What Would You Choose Rather**, a conversation or party game, and **Pokémon Go**, an augmented reality (AR) game, the most popular, and longest played video games in our research were **shooter games** or ‘**Battle Royale**’ – last-person standing, survival meets adventure – games. According to our research on popularity and time played, **Roblox** is king everywhere but in Spain (where **Brawl Stars** reigns). It’s also king of revenue, hitting a [\\$45 billion valuation](#) on the New York Stock Exchange where it recently began trading.

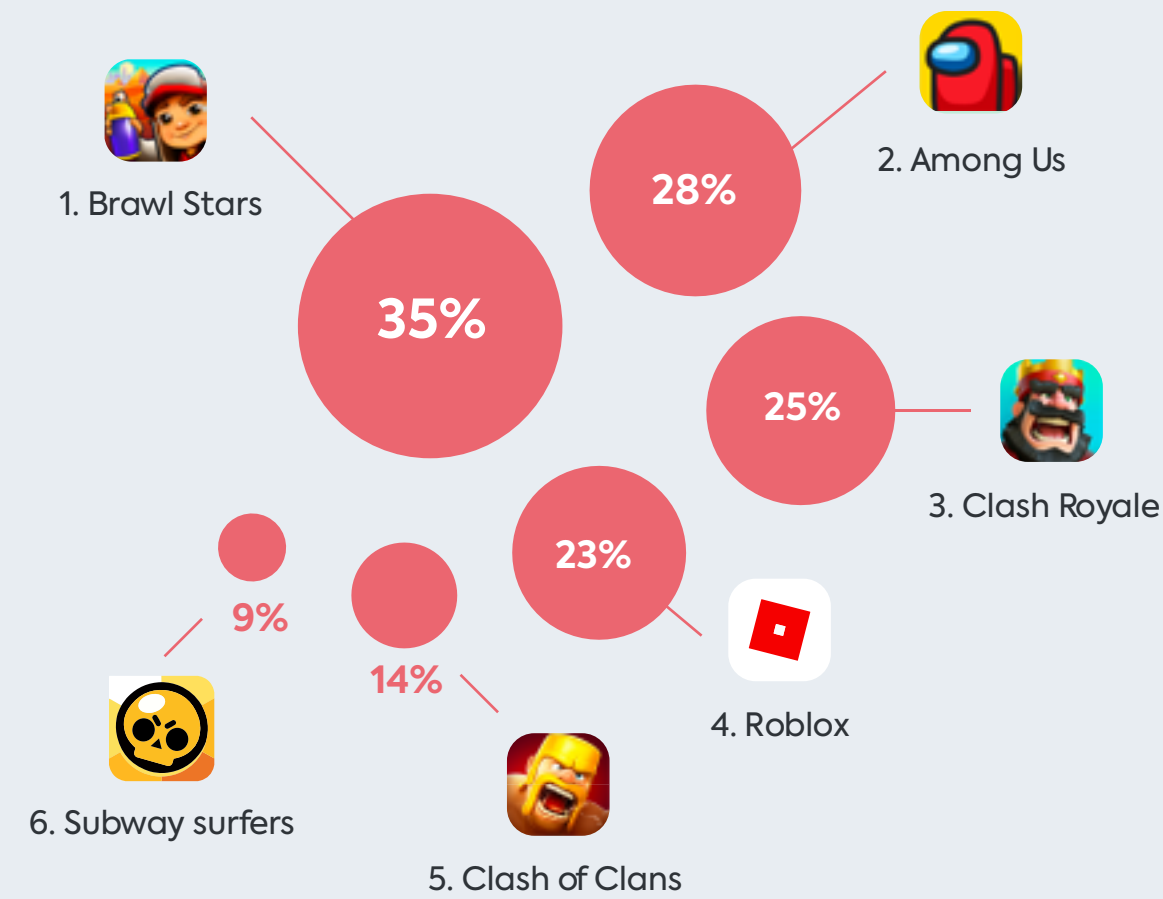
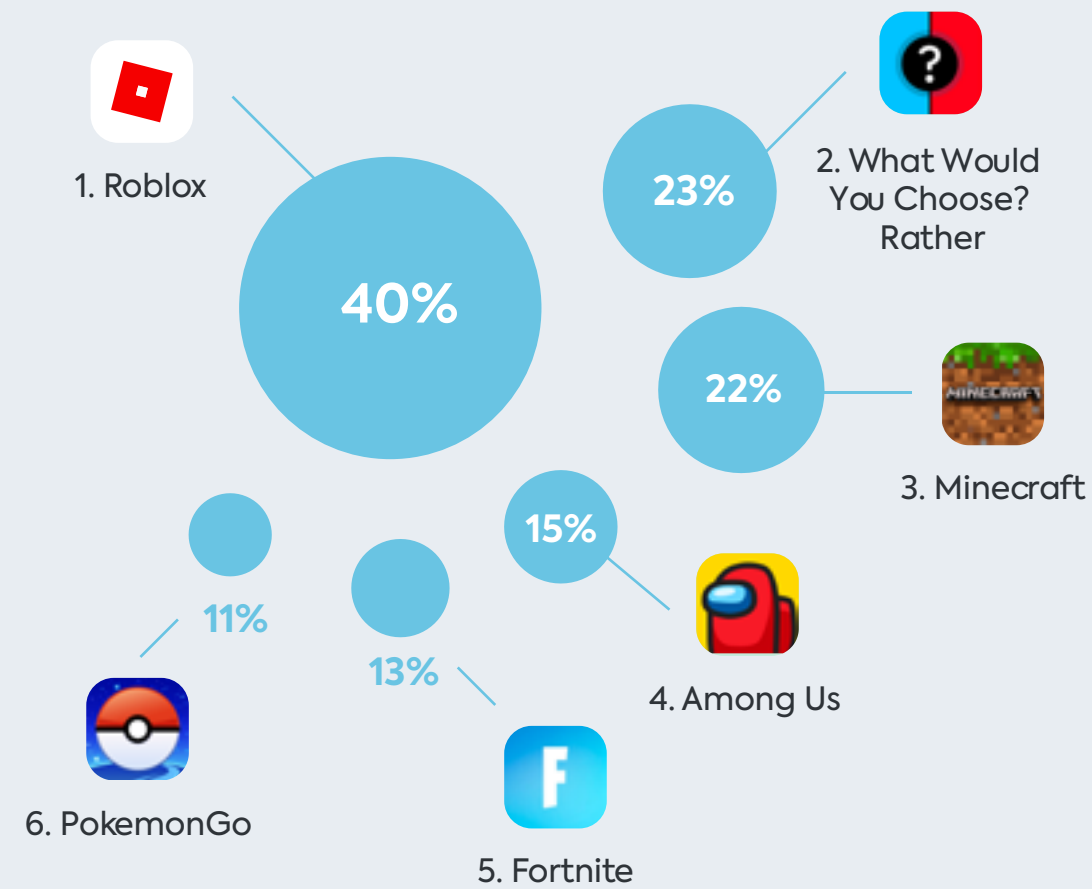
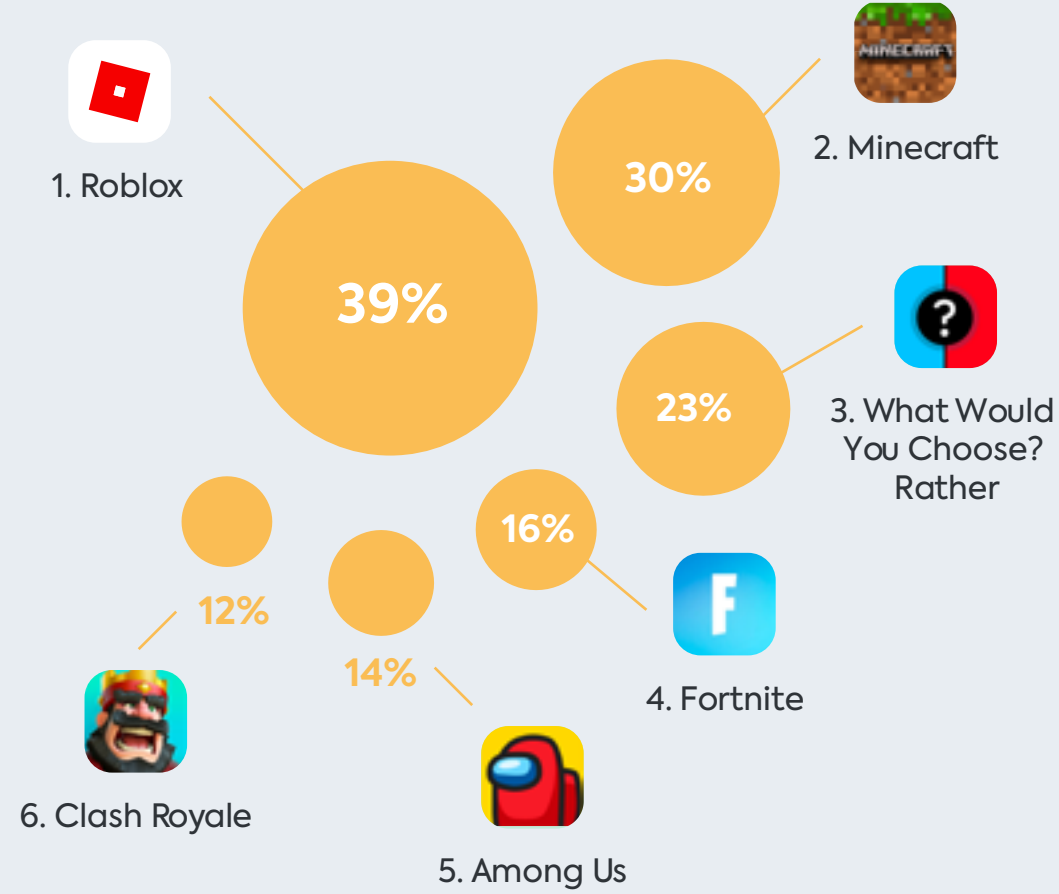
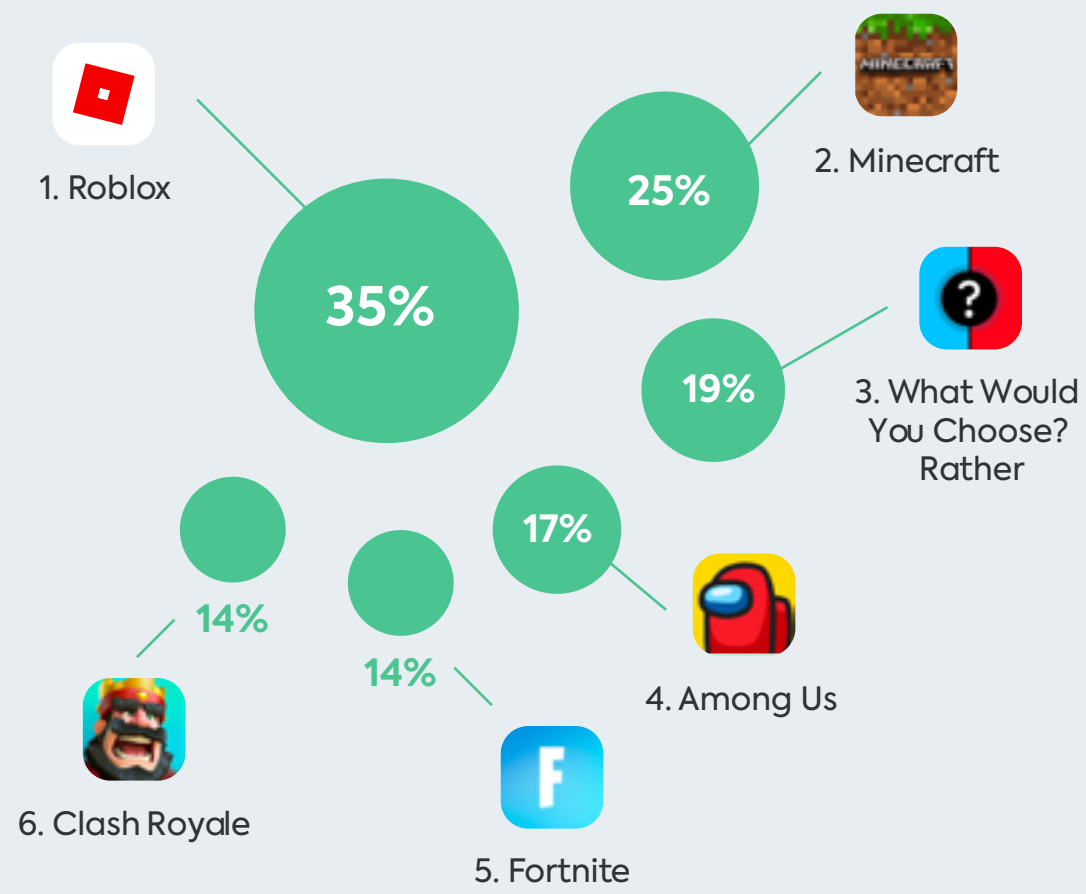
Kids in the **US** played video games the longest, but kids everywhere we analyzed played video games longer than in 2019, 23% longer on average. Kids also played video games during more hours of the day than they did before the pandemic hit in the spring.

What were the most popular video games among kids?

Roblox remained the most popular video game app with **35%** of kids playing it globally, **39%** in the US and **40%** in the UK, while **Brawl Stars** held on to the top spot with **35%** in Spain. New to the popularity chart in 2020 were **Among Us** – capturing fourth place globally and as high as second place in Spain – and **What Would You Choose Rather** – ranking third globally and reaching second place in the UK (beating out **Minecraft**).

Most popular video game apps (% of kids)

● GLOBAL ● US ● UK ● SPAIN



Global

2020

1.	Roblox	35%
2.	Minecraft	25%
3.	What would...	19%
4.	Among Us	17%
5.	Fortnite	14%
6.	Clash Royale	14%

2019

1.	Roblox	37%
2.	Minecraft	32%
3.	Paper.io	6%
4.	Helix Jump	15%
5.	Subway Surfers	15%
6.	Roblox	15%

US

2020

1.	Roblox	39%
2.	Minecraft	30%
3.	What would...	23%
4.	Fortnite	16%
5.	Among Us	14%
6.	Clash Royale	12%

2019

1.	Roblox	41%
2.	Minecraft	36%
3.	Paper.io	14%
4.	Helix Jump	14%
5.	Subway Surfers	14%
6.	Fortnite	13%

UK

2020

1.	Roblox	40%
2.	What would...	23%
3.	Minecraft	22%
4.	Among Us	15%
5.	Fortnite	13%
6.	Pokémon Go	11%

2019

1.	Roblox	40%
2.	Minecraft	31%
3.	Helix Jump	19%
4.	Paper.io	18%
5.	Subway Surfers	16%
6.	Pokémon Go	13%

Spain

2020

1.	Brawl Stars	35%
2.	Among Us	28%
3.	Clash Royale	25%
4.	Roblox	23%
5.	Clash of Clans	14%
6.	Subway Surfers	14%

2019

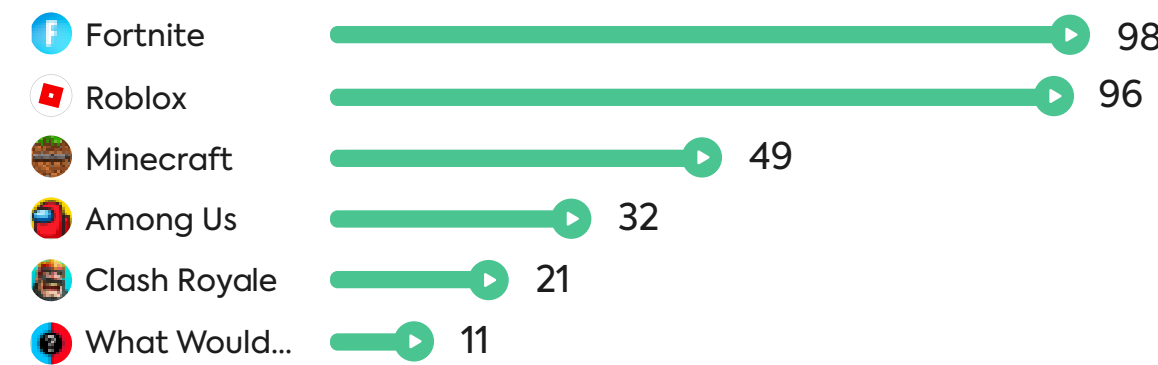
1.	Brawl Stars	47%
2.	Clash Royale	32%
3.	Clash of Clans	19%
4.	Subway Surfers	19%
5.	Helix Jump	19%
6.	Paper.io	19%

How much time did kids spend playing video games?

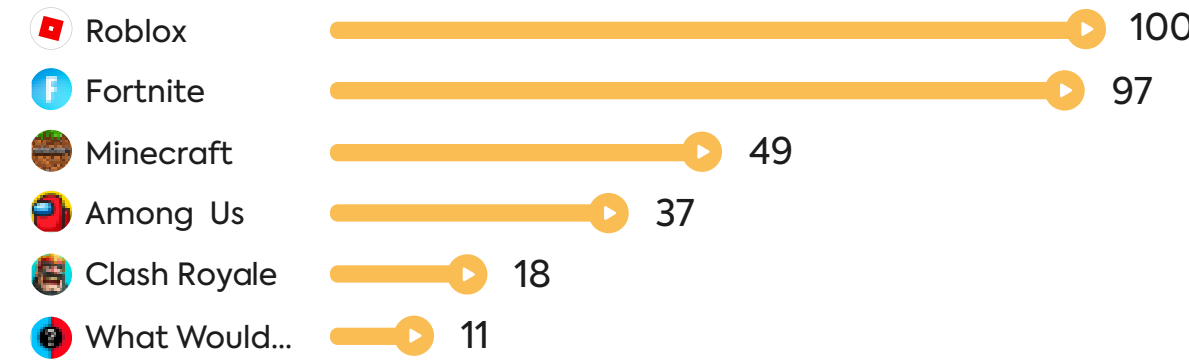
On a global and regional level, **Roblox** gained where **Fortnite** lost – kids played Roblox **23%** longer than they did in 2019, and played Fortnite **18%** less. Globally, kids still played Fortnite the longest: **98 mins/day** on average. But, on a regional level, kids played Roblox the longest, reaching on average as high **100 mins/day** in the US, **95 mins/day** in the UK, and **86 mins/day** in Spain – where kids played Roblox more than twice as long as they played **Brawl Stars**, the most popular app in the Spanish market.

While not among the most popular apps, the games kids played the longest were **World of Warcraft** (avg. **142 mins/day** globally), **Defense of the Ancients** (avg. **147 mins/day** in the US and avg. **133 mins/day** the UK), and **Block Strike** (avg. **220 mins/day** in Spain).

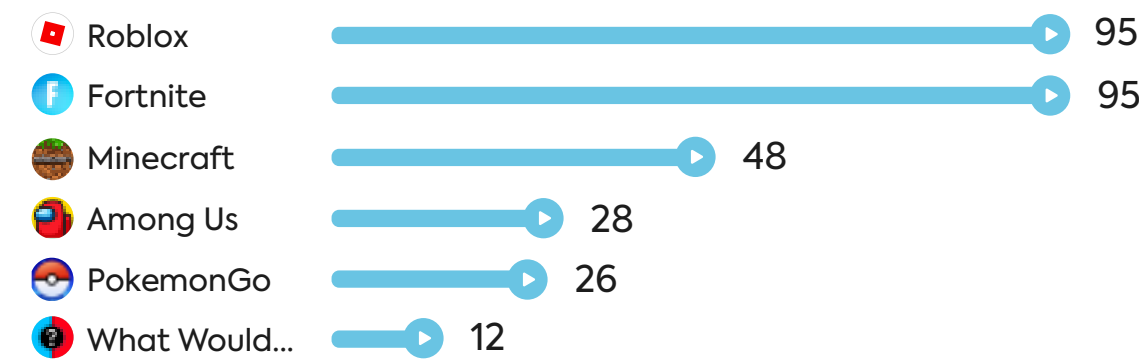
Time kids spent on the most popular video game apps (avg. mins/day)



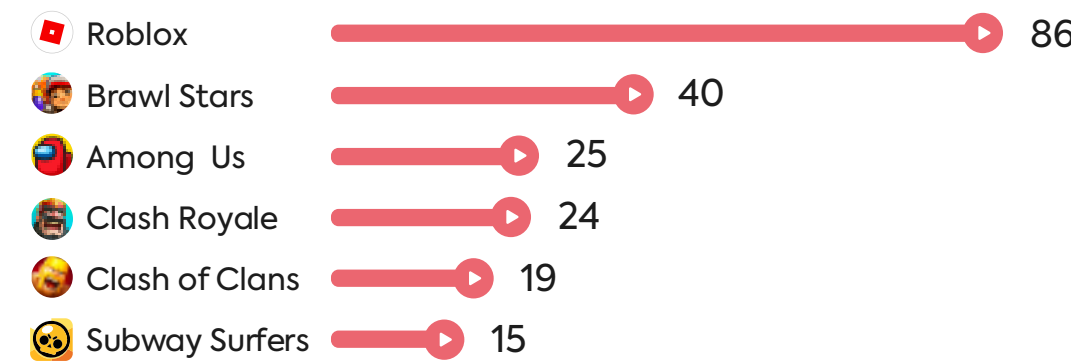
Global	2020	2019
1. Fortnite	98	119
2. Roblox	96	78
3. Minecraft	49	51
4. Among Us	32	NA
5. Clash Royale	21	22
6. What would...	11	NA



US	2020	2019
1. Roblox	100	83
2. Fortnite	97	120
3. Minecraft	49	53
4. Among Us	37	25
5. Clash Royale	18	23
6. What would...	11	NA



UK	2020	2019
1. Roblox	95	71
2. Fortnite	95	109
3. Minecraft	48	46
4. Among Us	28	24
5. PokemonGo	26	20
6. What would...	12	46



Spain	2020	2019
1. Roblox	86	60
2. Brawl Stars	40	29
3. Among Us	25	26
4. Clash Royale	24	21
5. Clash of Clans	19	17
6. Subway Surfers	15	9

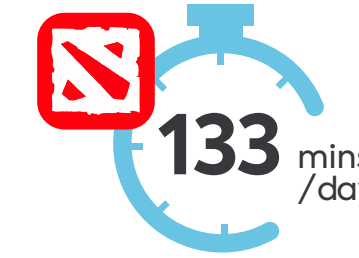
Bonus stats



World of Warcraft
Video game kids played the longest globally



World of Warcraft
Video game kids played the longest in the US



Defense of the Ancients
Video game kids played the longest in the UK

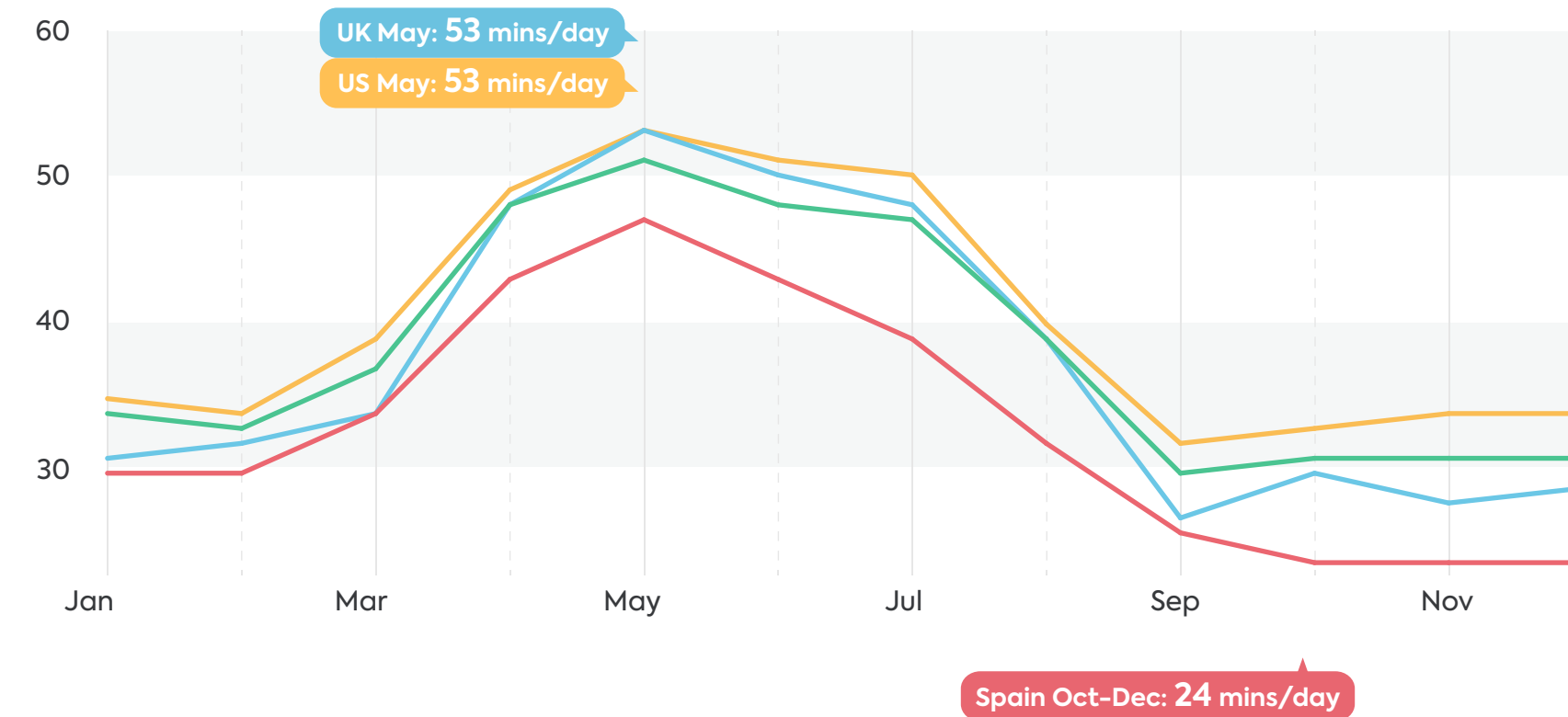


Block Strike
Video game kids played the longest in Spain



On both a global and a regional level, kids spent the most time playing video games in **May**, reaching an average of **53 mins/day**. As in other categories, the shift to an earlier peak in the spring (June and August were the peak months in 2019) was due to the Covid effect. On average for the year, **kids in the US played video games the longest** (40 mins/day). Kids in Spain played the least on average (33 mins/day).

Time kids spent on video game apps in general (avg. mins/day)

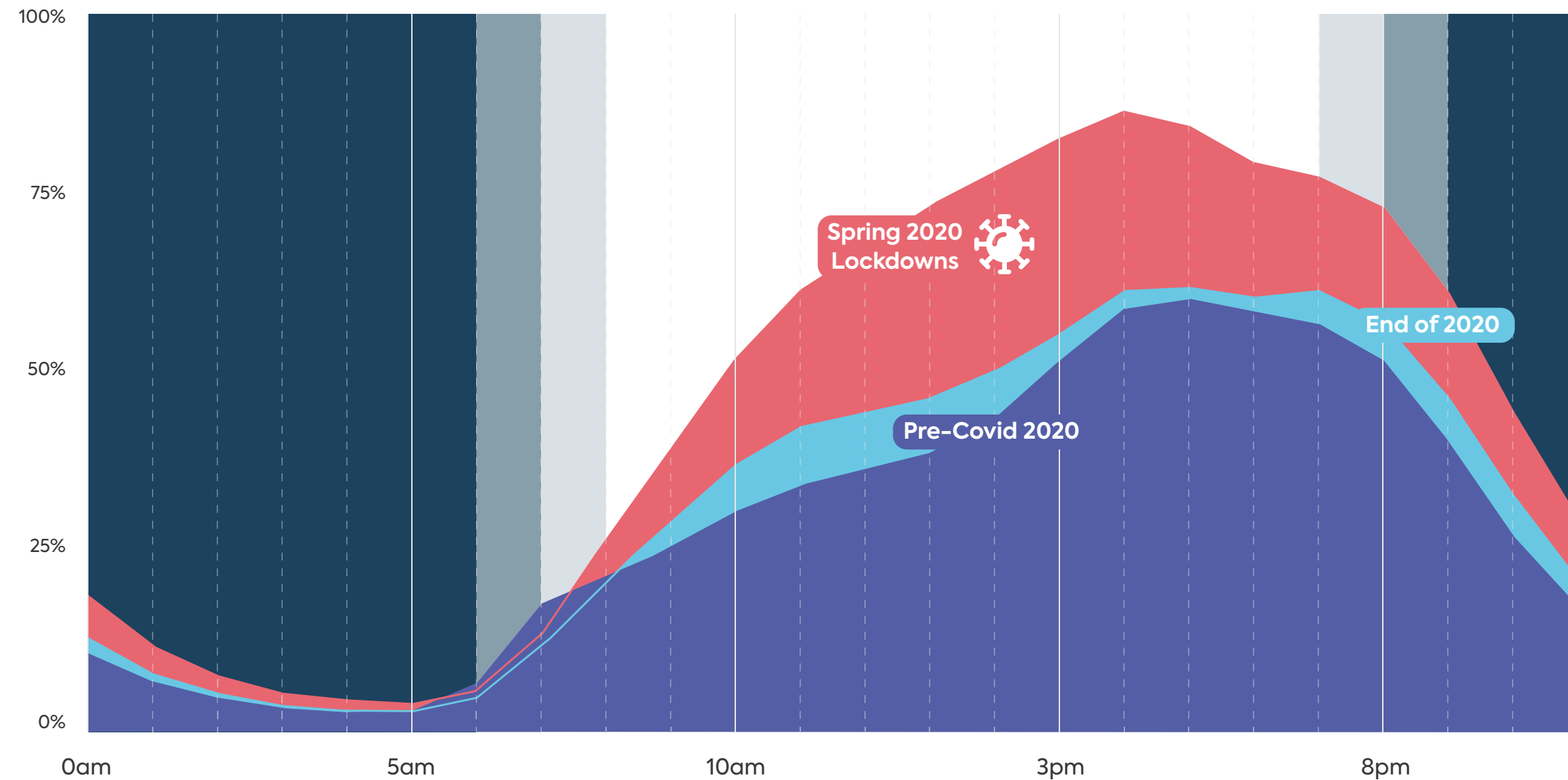


	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Ago	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Avg
Global	34	33	37	48	51	48	47	39	30	31	31	31	38
US	35	34	39	49	53	51	50	40	32	33	34	34	40
UK	31	32	34	48	53	50	48	39	27	30	28	29	37
Spain	30	30	34	43	47	43	39	32	26	24	24	24	33

What time of day did kids play video games?

As in other categories, more kids were watching video games earlier in the day during the strict Covid-19 lockdowns in the spring. While peak play time was still at **4pm**, more kids were online viewing video games at 10am in April than back in January. By December, the percentage of kids watching video games in a typical day started to return to “normal” levels, but more kids were still connecting earlier in the day.

Times of day kids played video game apps in general (% of kids)

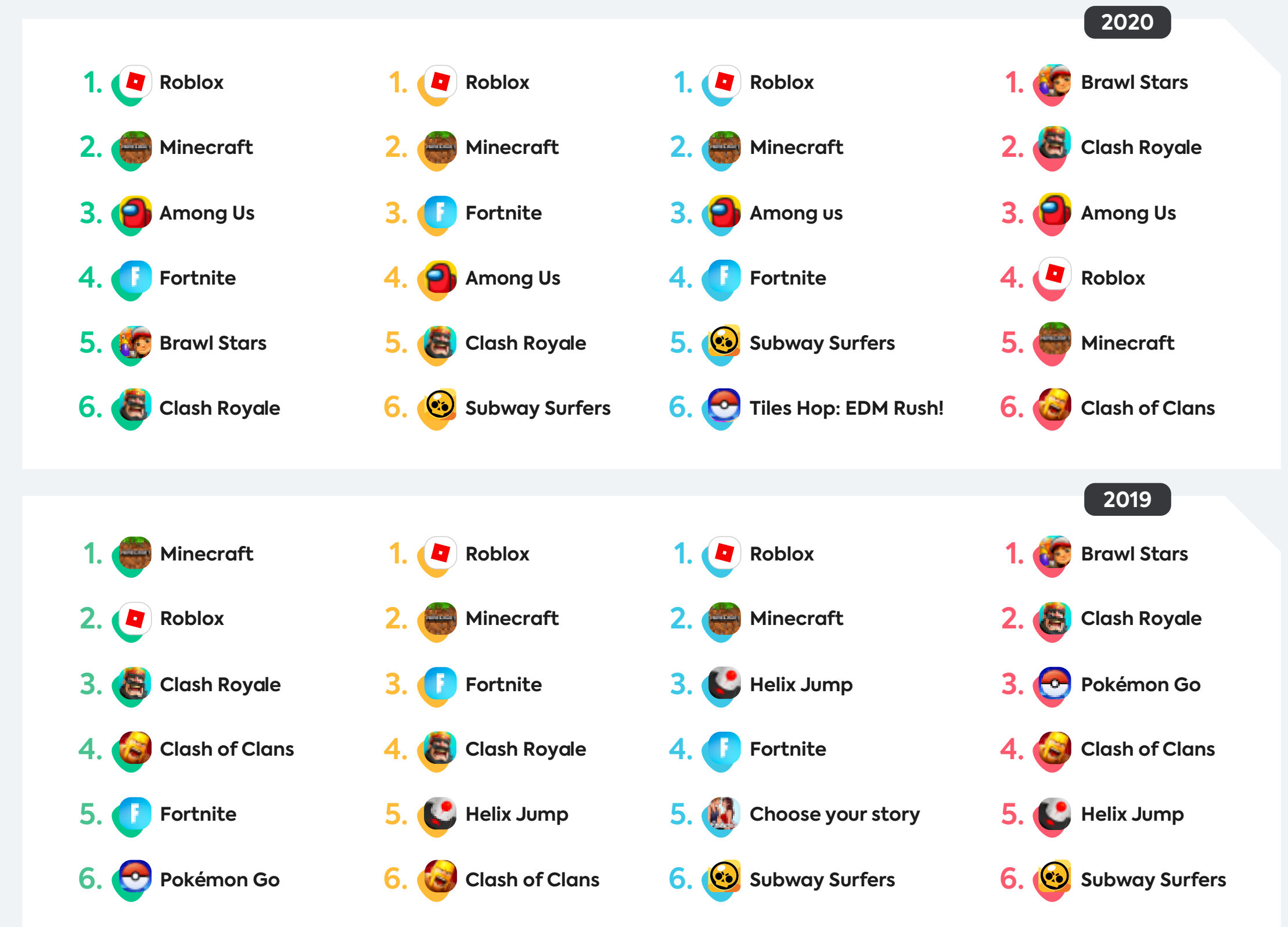


Which video game apps did parents block most?

Similar to 2019, and to the kids’ popularity list, parents blocked **Roblox**, **Brawl Stars** (in Spain), **Minecraft** and **Fortnite** the most. New

to the 2020 list was **Among Us**, which went from unranked to the third most blocked app globally. Missing from the most blocked list was the other newcomer in terms of popularity, **What Would You Choose Rather**, and the classic **Pokémon Go**.

Most blocked video game apps (% of parents)





What we expect

Due to the huge success of the category, competition between free-to-play adventure shooter games will increase. That said, we think there is demand for less violent options within games like **Royale High**, one of many **Roblox** virtual worlds, and we hope more games will evolve in this direction.

What likely won't change is the addictive nature of video games. The ability to buy and advertise on these platforms is what makes these 'free' games free. Without stricter legislation on **loot boxes** and other gambling-like features inside of games, the AI game developers use to hook kids to these games, and to make in-app purchases, will only get better.

And the play-all-day-long habits kids started during the lockdowns will be hard to break. A life-saver for kids who had no other way to play with their friends during the pandemic, the games they started won't be easy to stop.

What we recommend

When it comes to gaming, parents have a huge responsibility to stay involved. Parents should always find time to **play at least one round of video games together with their kids** to really understand the content, level of violence or inappropriate language, the kind of advertising and purchase items, and most importantly, to know who their kids are playing with.

But, it doesn't stop with having an understanding of the game. Parents also need to be on top of the social and communication apps kids use to live-stream their games and discuss them with friends and strangers online, such as **Twitch** and **Discord**. These apps can also be entry points for all kinds of predators, data thieves, cyberbullies and groomers.

Marc Masip, Psychologist, thinks the risk of playing video games outweighs the positives. He says, "Families need to understand the high risk of addiction that now exists in video games. The positive thing about video games is that they produce fun, but that is something that can be achieved with countless alternatives. On the contrary, video games can produce very negative consequences. If you see your child suffering from social isolation, drop in school

performance, aggressiveness, avoidance, frustration... **letting them play video games is just not a good idea."**

Josep Gaspar, Qustodio co-founder and Gaming Expert, sees gaming in a more positive light but with a caveat. "Online video games were a lifesaver for many kids during the pandemic. They were both a distraction from a Covid-19 dominated world and a way to stay in touch with friends through group play. Not to mention they can be creative and a lot of fun! But, because online games with chat functionality can be gateways to predators, parents need to be extra vigilant about who their kids are playing with and **review game privacy settings**. Friends are fine. But friends of friends are not."



“If you see your child suffering from social isolation, drop in school performance, aggressiveness, avoidance, frustration... letting them play video games is just not a good idea”

Marc Masip
Psychologist, Expert in Addiction
and Founder of Desconecta

Education



What we found

Education or Ed-tech is a huge space, and it grew even larger in 2020. **Google Classroom**, the most popular education app globally and in every region we analyzed except the UK (where **ShareMyHomework** was number one), grew to [150 million](#) (students, teachers and admins) from 40 million last year. This growth was thanks in large part to the shift to schooling going either partially or fully online during the pandemic. At its peak, 90% of learners ([1.6 billion people](#)) were affected across 190 countries. Still today, [888 million children](#) still face school disruptions.

According to our analysis, for the whole year, education app use grew **54%**. And, Spain stood out as the region with the greatest surge in education app use during the pandemic and the highest average of time connected.

What were the most popular education apps?

Due to its size and the variety of apps in the education category, for popularity we divided education into two types: **classroom management apps** and **learning apps**. In the classroom management sub-category, **Google Classroom** remained the most popular app globally and in every region except the UK, where **Show My Homework** was still the most popular, but by less than 1%. **Google Classroom** was more than **3x** more popular than second place **Remind School Communication** globally and in the US, and more than **16x** more popular **Edmodo**, second in Spain.

Language, math, and quizzing apps dominated the most popular apps of 2020. **Duolingo** was the most popular globally and across the US, the UK and Spain, two years in a row. **Kahoot!** and **Photomath** jostled for second and third place. New to 2020, was **WordReference Dictionary**, which came in fourth globally, in the UK and in Spain, and sixth in the US.

Most popular classroom management apps (% of kids)

2020

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Google Classroom | 1. Google Classroom | 1. Show My Homework | 1. Google Classroom |
| 2. Remind: School Communication | 2. Remind: School Communication | 2. Google Classroom | 2. Edmodo |
| 3. Canvas Student | 3. Canvas Student | 3. Edmodo | 3. BlinkLearning |
| 4. EDpuzzle | 4. EDpuzzle | 4. EDpuzzle | 4. EdPuzzle |
| 5. Kids A-Z | 5. PowerSchool Mobile | 5. Canvas Student | 5. Aula Virtual 3 Santillana |
| 6. PowerSchool Mobile | 6. Kids A-Z | 6. Remind: School Communication | 6. SMSavia (by Educamos) |

2019

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Google Classroom | 1. Google Classroom | 1. Show My Homework | 1. Google Classroom |
| 2. Remind: School Communication | 2. Remind: School Communication | 2. Google Classroom | 2. Edmodo |
| 3. PowerSchool Mobile | 3. Canvas Student | 3. Edmodo | 3. SMSavia (by Educamos) |
| 4. Canvas Student | 4. Skyward Mobile Access | 4. Tapestry Mobile | 4. Blinklearning |
| 5. Skyward Mobile Access | 5. Edmodo | 5. Canvas Student | 5. Aula Virtual 3 Santillana |
| 6. Edmodo | 6. Show My Homework | 6. Remind: School Communication | 6. edebéOn |

Most popular learning apps (% of kids)

2020

- | | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Duolingo | 1. Duolingo | 1. Duolingo | 1. Duolingo |
| 2. Kahoot! | 2. Photomath | 2. Kahoot! | 2. Photomath |
| 3. Photomath | 3. Kahoot! | 3. Quizlet | 3. Kahoot! |
| 4. WordReference Dictionary | 4. Quizlet | 4. WordReference Dictionary | 4. WordReference Dictionary |
| 5. Quizlet | 5. Khan Academy | 5. Photomath | 5. Smartick - learn math |
| 6. Khan Academy | 6. WordReference Dictionary | 6. IXL | 6. Quizlet |

2019

- | | | | |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Duolingo | 1. Duolingo | 1. Duolingo | 1. Duolingo |
| 2. Photomath | 2. Photomath | 2. Kahoot! | 2. Photomath |
| 3. Kahoot! | 3. Kahoot! | 3. Quizlet | 3. Kahoot! |
| 4. Quizlet | 4. Quizlet | 4. Photomath | 4. Smartick - learn math |
| 5. Khan Academy | 5. Khan Academy | 5. IXL | 5. Quizlet |
| 6. IXL | 6. IXL | 6. Khan Academy | 6. U-Dictionary |

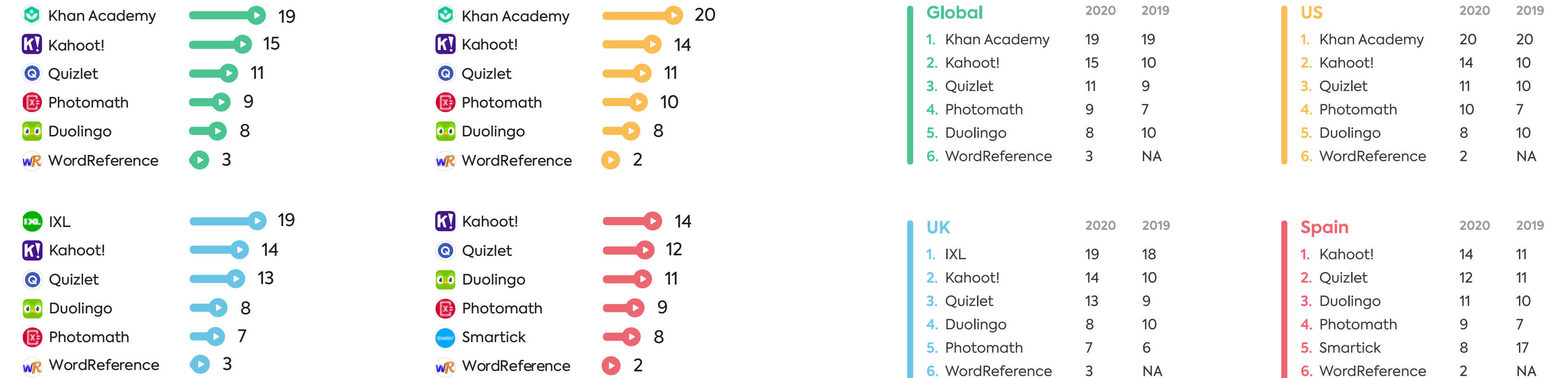
How much time did kids spend on learning apps?

We researched time spent only on learning apps instead of on classroom management apps because time spent on management apps is currently extremely small. For example, in the US, the region where kids spent the most time on classroom management apps, kids only spent **6 mins/day** on **Google Classroom** and **3 mins/day** on **Remind: School Communication**. These low numbers indicate that kids were more likely to be using these tools via the web, not mobile apps, and use the app only for a quick check in on their homework status.

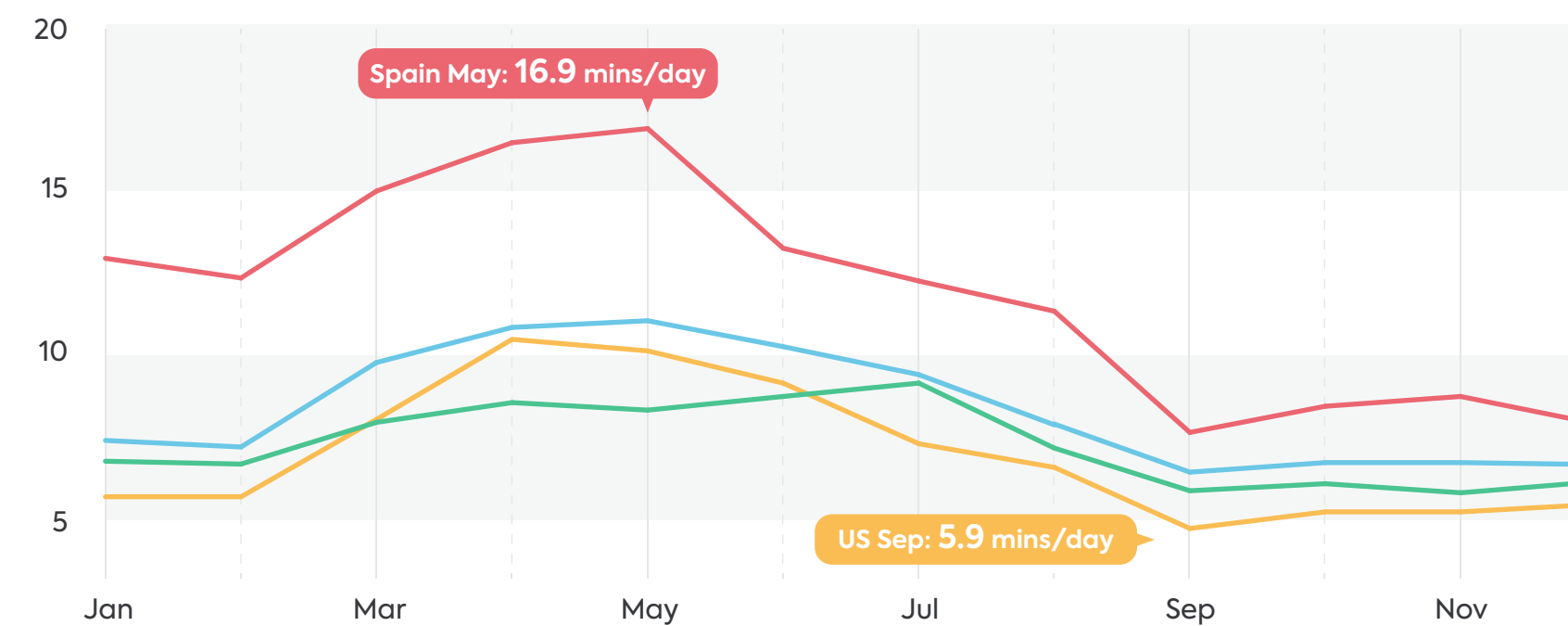
In regards to learning apps, kids spent the most time on subscription based apps that offer full courses, such as **Khan Academy** (globally and the US), and **IXL** (UK). In Spain, where these types of education services are not among the most popular, quizzing apps such as **Kahoot!** and **Quizlet** were used the longest. Globally, time spent on Kahoot! increased **50%**. Kids used learning apps less than **20 mins/day** on average.

As in other app categories, kids' use of education apps (management and learning combined) soared in the spring due to the pandemic restrictions. Kids in Spain used education apps the longest, an average of nearly **12 mins/day**, peaking at nearly **17 mins/day**.

Time kids spent on the most popular learning apps (avg. mins/day)



Time kids spent on education apps in general (avg. mins/day)

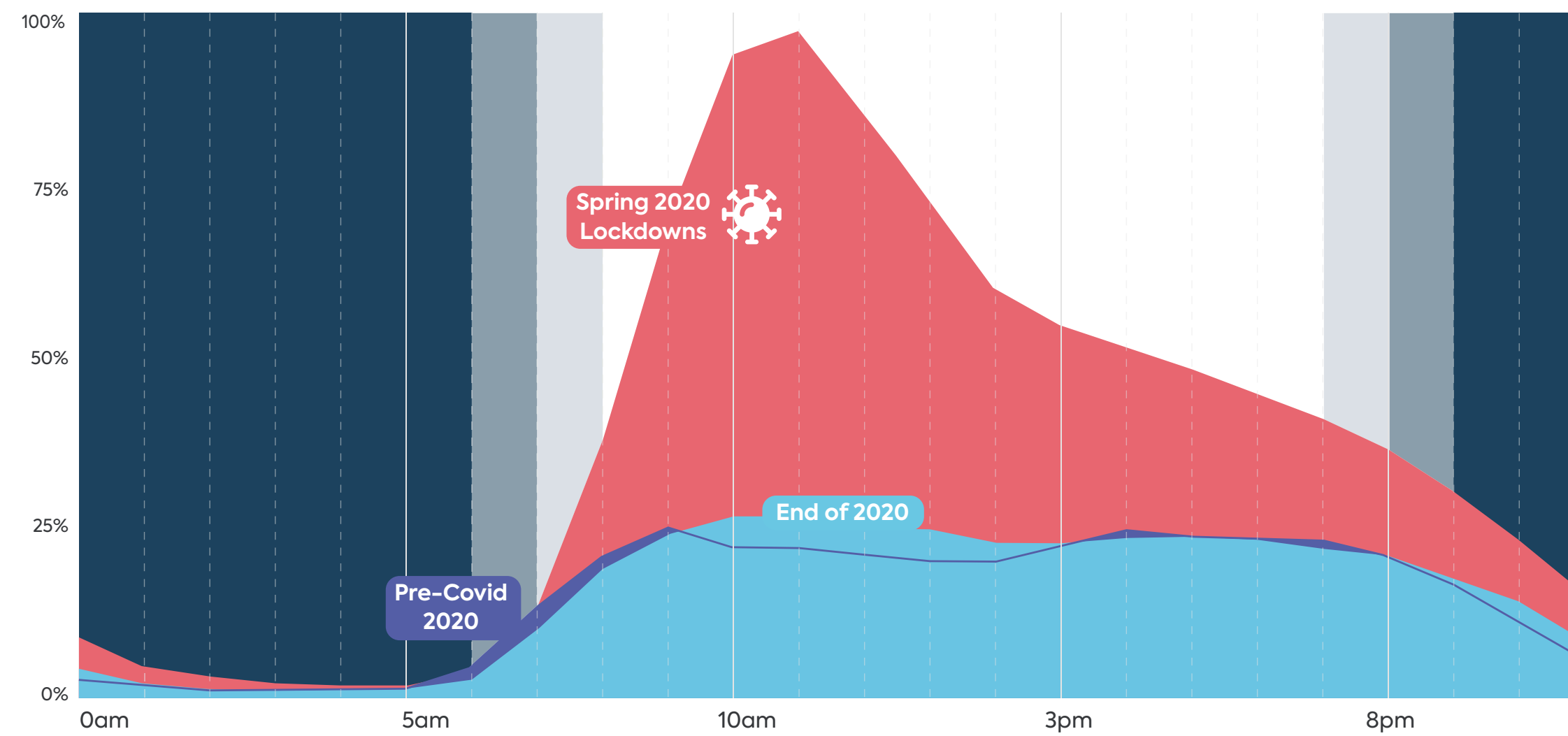


	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Ago	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Avg
Global	7.4	7.2	9.7	10.9	11.1	10.2	9.4	7.9	6.5	6.8	6.8	6.7	8.4
US	6.8	6.7	8.0	8.6	8.3	8.8	9.2	7.2	5.9	6.1	5.8	6.2	7.3
UK	5.7	5.8	8.0	10.5	10.1	9.2	7.4	6.6	4.8	5.3	5.2	5.5	7.0
Spain	12.9	12.4	15.0	16.5	16.9	13.3	12.3	11.3	7.6	8.5	8.7	7.9	11.9

What time of day did kids use education apps?

Kids' use of education apps during the day skyrocketed **162%** during spring lockdowns. Use peaked between 10am and 11am and continued during traditional school-time hours – a reflection of kids learning online. As the year went on, education app use returned to near pre-covid levels, the only category to do so.

Time of day kids connected to education apps



Most blocked education apps (% of parents)

● GLOBAL ● US ● UK ● SPAIN

2020



2019



Which education apps did parents block most?

Parents blocked **Google Classroom**, the coordination app [accused of tracking student activities and locations outside the classroom](#), more than any other education-related app globally and in every region except the UK, where it came in third. **Duolingo**, the language learning app that received some [backlash for its notifications](#), was the second most blocked app globally and in the US. **Photomath**, a math app that some children used as a [cheating tool](#) (the company's website says [75%](#) of kids use it correctly) was the third most blocked education app globally and second in Spain.

What we expect

Even as kids are allowed to return to school in person, we expect the use of online classroom management apps to continue to grow. Teachers and administrators, now accustomed to using these tools will want to continue to use them both as a more efficient way to organize schoolwork and as a way to be better prepared to communicate with students outside of school in case of future waves of Covid-19 require children to return to homeschooling. **Google Classroom** will maintain its lead position globally and may finally overtake **ShowMyHomework** in the UK.

Among the learning apps, we don't expect any major changes. Nevertheless, we think the learning app space is due for a shakeup, so we would not be surprised to see a new player jump onto the charts like we saw in the gaming category. More gamification and using AI to facilitate learning would be welcome.



What we recommend

We love when technology is used for good, especially for educational purposes. But we have two concerns. The first is the amount of time kids spend learning online. While spending **15 mins/day** on an education app like **Kahoot!** doesn't sound like much, if a child has already been online all day long, this extra screen time can take its toll physically and mentally. For things like homework and classroom communication, we understand kids don't have a choice, they have to connect. We recommend that both parents and educators try to keep online school work to a minimum and help kids learn in a more hands-on way whenever possible.

Our second concern is data privacy. In general parents trust schools, and schools are doing their best to go digital. But in the rush to digitize, parents and even educators may be putting children's data to the hands of third parties they aren't aware of. Parents should talk to their school administrators to get a clear understanding of how their child's data is stored and shared.

Malcolm Bain, Legal and EU privacy expert, encourages parents not to trust schools

blindly. **“To make sure sensitive information about your child is being used correctly, you should understand what data schools have about your children, how it is used and with whom it is shared.** Under GDPR, schools have the right to process all personal data relating to the child that is relevant for their education and personal development. This includes not just basic identification, but also health data that impacts education (and school lunches!), and social-psychological data as regards learning skills and capabilities, aptitudes, and interactions with other children. **Schools don't need consent from parents for processing this data,** but they do need to inform parents (and children over 14). Both children and parents have full rights to request access to this information, correct it or oppose processing it – but schools can refuse to delete or modify this information when it is necessary for them to carry out public duties or defend their own legal interests.”

Maria Guerrero, Family Psychologist, worries about the education millions of children missed during the pandemic and the quality of online education, especially for younger children. “Research increasingly shows that too much ti-

me online affects the development of children's gray matter and their ability to concentrate, both are keys to learning. To ensure proper social and neurological development and to lay a solid basis for learning, parents should ensure that kids get **face-to-face instruction** and are allowed to touch and explore every day. **Give your child every opportunity to learn in an off-line way.** Read books, not ebooks. Practicing writing with a pencil, not a keyboard. Play board games, not video games. Use flash cards instead of quiz apps.”

“Give your child every opportunity to learn in an off-line way. Read books, not ebooks. Practicing writing with a pencil, not a keyboard. Play board games, not video games.”

María Guerrero, Family Psychologist



Communica- tion



What we found

While **WhatsApp** was the communication app leader, 2020 was **Zoom's** year. The company responded quickly to the pandemic and evolved its app from a focus on corporate video conferencing to becoming an app for everyone and everything from talking to grandma to having virtual dinner parties. Zoom became a household name overnight, and its success is reflected in our research, going from no rank in 2019 to the top of the popularity chart in the US and second globally.

Discord, originally a community chat app for gamers, also expanded its reach and went mainstream, taking off during the pandemic and growing over **90%** in popularity for the year. In fact, all six of the top communication apps showed at least some growth in popularity. The pandemic lockdowns and other restrictions also boosted how long kids spent on communication apps. Time spent on apps in the communication category grew to an average of **91 mins/day**, a **49%** increase over 2019.

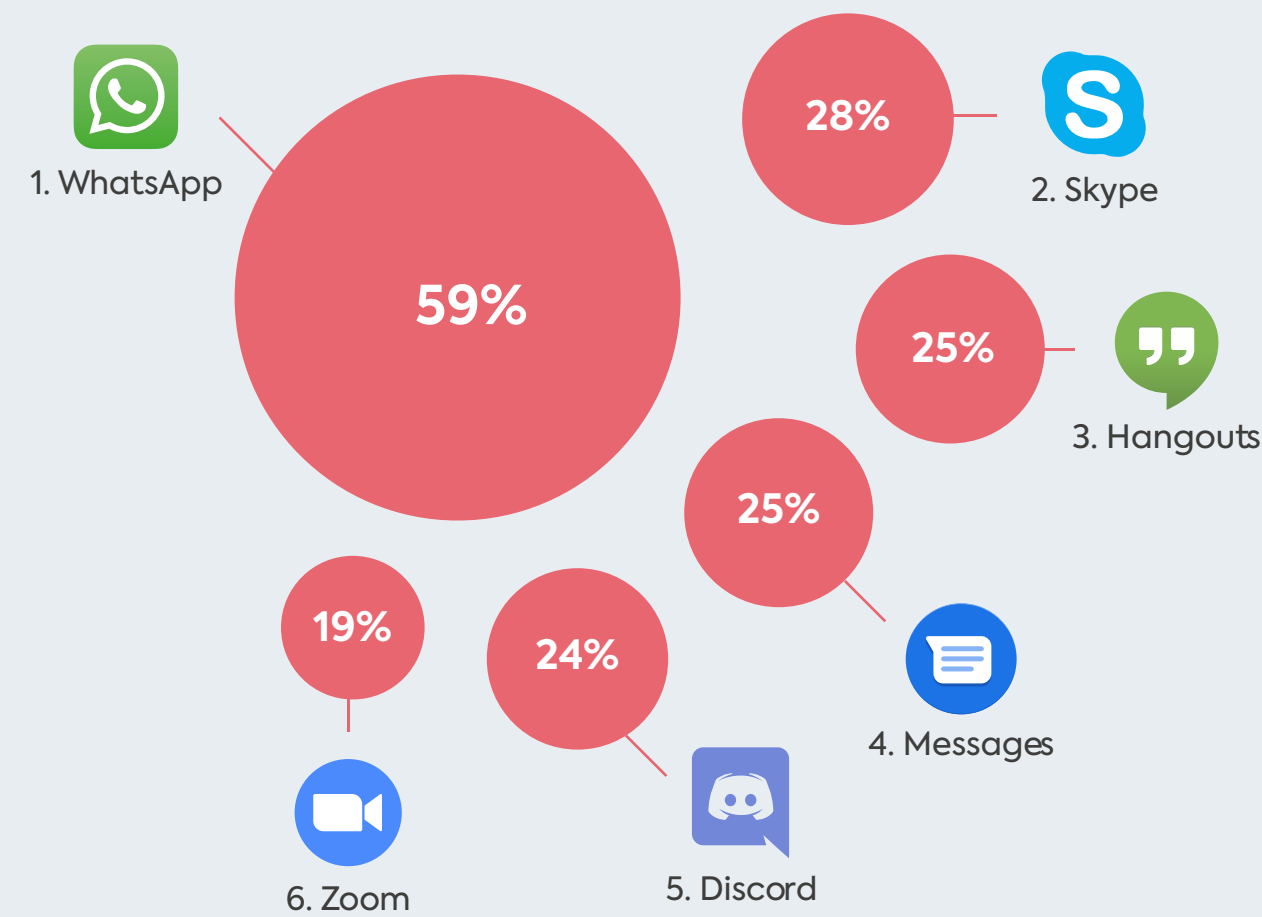
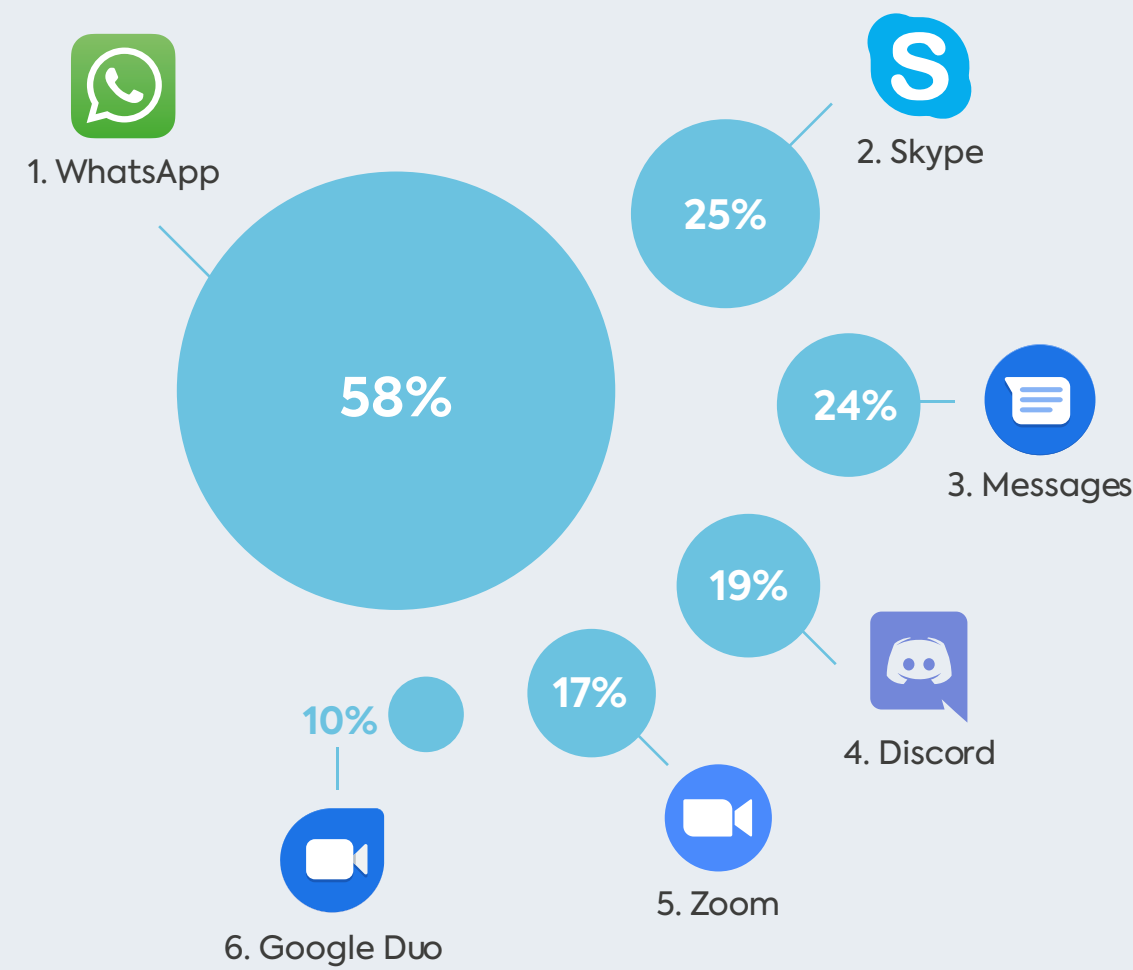
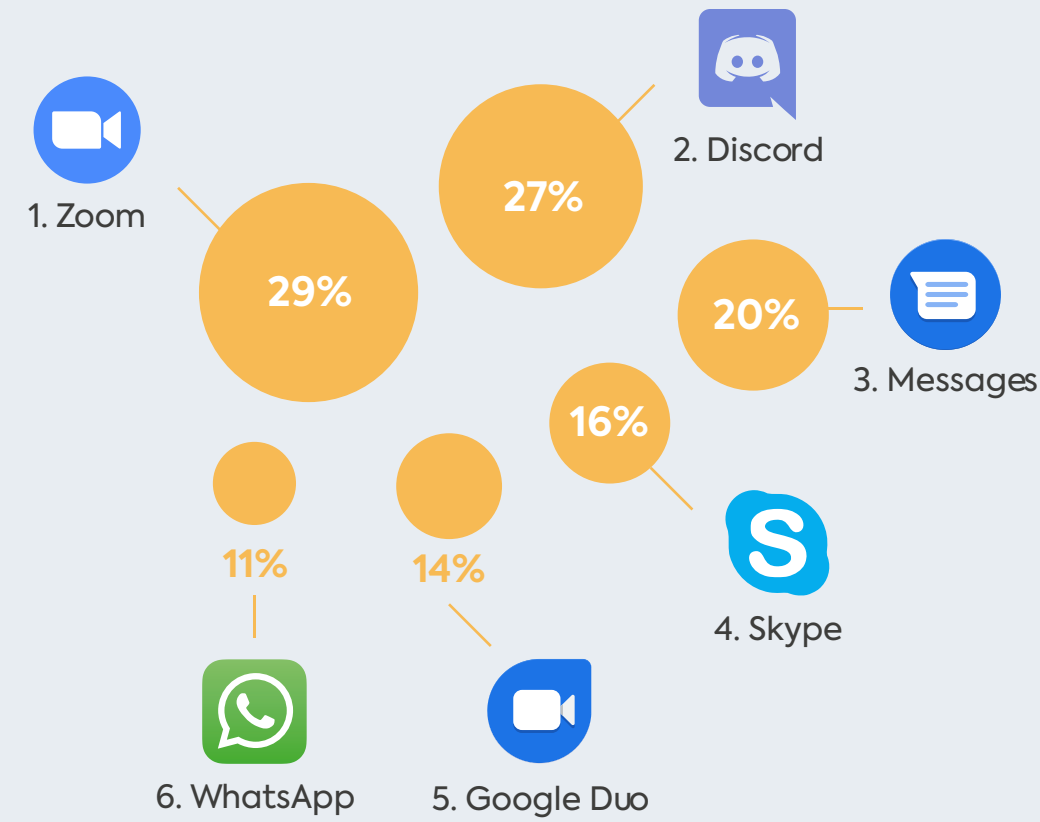
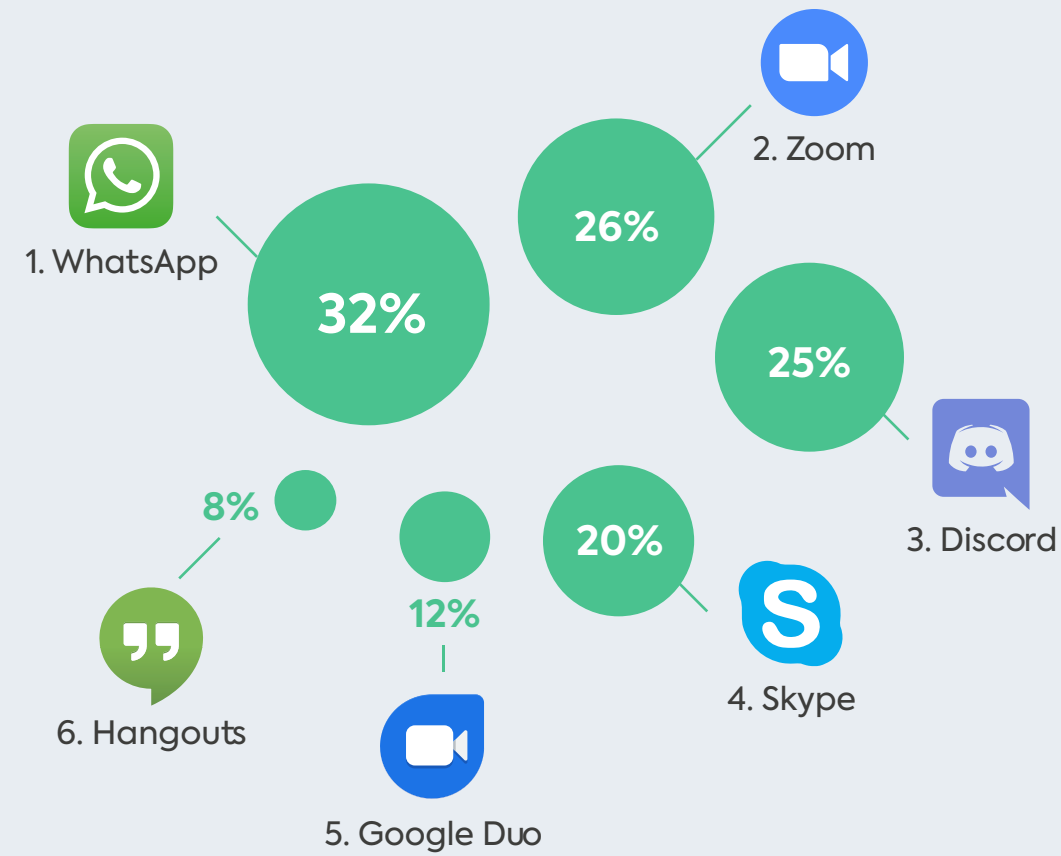
As we saw in other app categories, kids' use of communication apps soared in the spring with the arrival of strict pandemic restrictions and kids began using those apps throughout the entire day, instead of primarily after school like they did pre-Covid. Unique to this category, a second surge in use occurred in October globally, led by the US where the [third, and most severe wave of Covid-19 was starting](#).

What were the most popular communication apps?

Not ranked in 2019, **Zoom** not only became one of the most popular communication apps globally and in every region we analyzed in 2020, it was **number one** in the US. In the other regions, **WhatsApp** was the most popular. While never highly popular in the US, WhatsApp ranked in the top six in that region for the first time. **Discord** and **Skype** also increased in popularity globally and in every region. On a global level, Discord's popularity increased **92%** and Skype's popularity increased **60%**.

Most popular communication apps (% of kids)

● GLOBAL ● US ● UK ● SPAIN



Global

2020

- WhatsApp 32%
- Zoom 26%
- Discord 25%
- Skype 20%
- Google Duo 12%
- Hangouts 8%

2019

- WhatsApp 30%
- Messages 21%
- Discord 13%
- Skype 12%
- Google Duo 8%
- Hangouts 8%

US

2020

- Zoom 29%
- Discord 27%
- Messages 20%
- Skype 16%
- Google Duo 14%
- WhatsApp 11%

2019

- Messages 21%
- Discord 16%
- Skype 13%
- Google Duo 11%
- WhatsApp 9%
- Hangouts 8%

UK

2020

- WhatsApp 58%
- Skype 25%
- Messages 24%
- Discord 19%
- Zoom 17%
- Google Duo 10%

2019

- Messages 23%
- Skype 14%
- Discord 10%
- Google Duo 6%
- Hangouts 5%
- Viber 4%

Spain

2020

- WhatsApp 59%
- Skype 28%
- Hangouts 25%
- Messages 25%
- Discord 24%
- Zoom 19%

2019

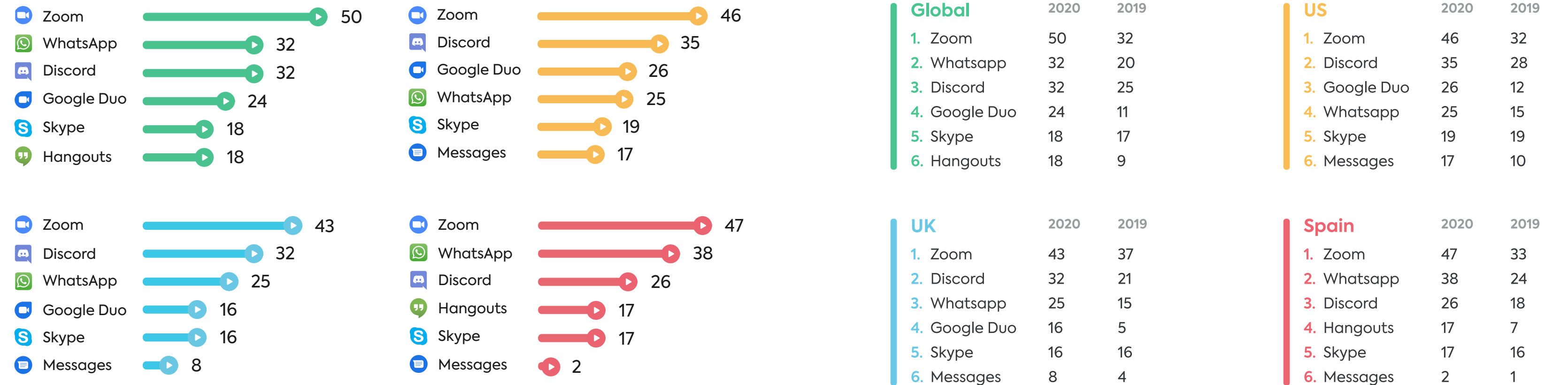
- WhatsApp 60%
- Messages 20%
- Hangouts 18%
- Skype 10%
- Google Duo 7%
- Discord 7%

How much time did kids spend on communication apps?

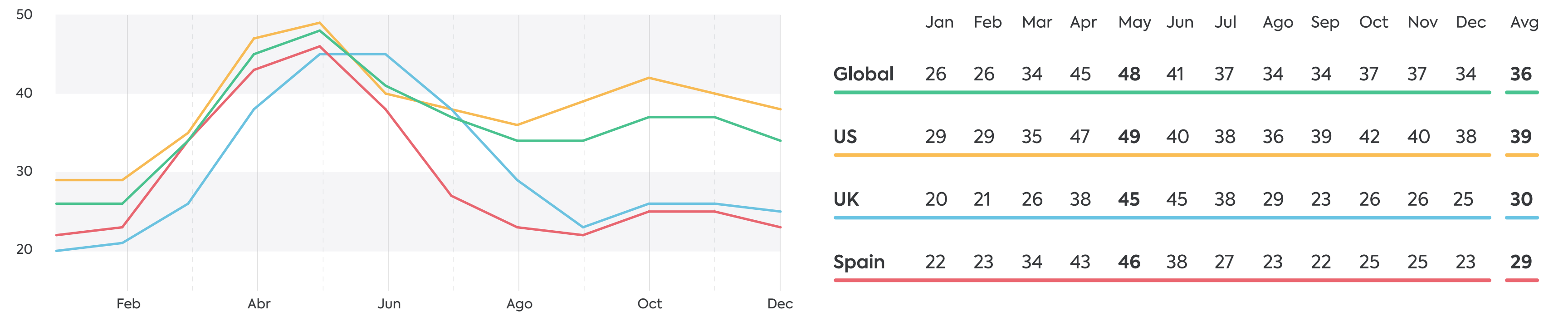
Zoom was not just among the communication apps kids used most, it was also among those they used the longest, on average **50 mins/day**, and **56%** more than the most popular app, **WhatsApp**. WhatsApp and **Discord** tied for the second with kids using each of those apps an average of **32 mins/day**. Globally, kids used the top six communication apps longer in 2020 than in 2019, making it the only category where every popular app grew on average in terms of time connected.

Kids in every region spent the most time connected in **May** at the height of the pandemic lockdowns in the spring, with the peak extending to June in the UK. Unique to the communication app category, kids' use of these apps rose again in **October**, most sharply in the US.

Time kids spent on the most popular communication apps (avg. mins/day)



Time kids spent on communication apps in general (avg. mins/day)

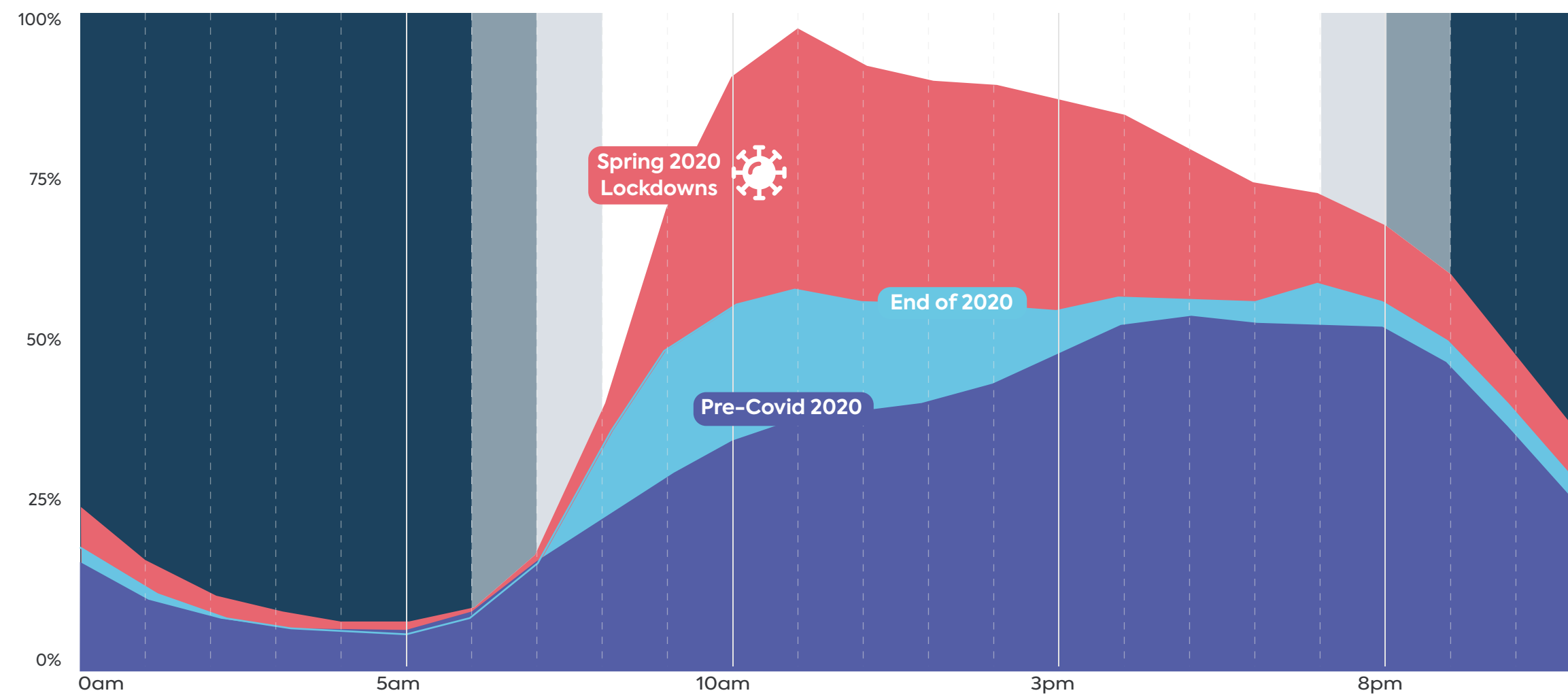


What time of day did kids use communication apps?

Before Covid, kids used communication apps mostly after school, with most kids connecting between 4pm and 8pm. The spring Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions dramatically shifted the peak from the afternoon to the morning with the majority of kids using communication apps at 11 am, continuing until 9pm. By the end of the year, fewer kids were using communication apps but they were still using them **all day long**, with peaks at 11am and at 7pm.



Times of day kids used communication apps in general (% of kids)



Most blocked communication apps (% of parents)

● GLOBAL ● US ● UK ● SPAIN

2020



2019



Which communication apps did parents block most?

Globally and in the US, parents blocked **Discord**, the community chat app that has made recent strides to be safer for kids, but [has no parental controls](#), more than any other communication app. It bumped 2019's most blocked communication app, **WhatsApp**, [under scrutiny for opening up further data sharing](#) with parent company Facebook, into second place. Just as **Zoom** grew in popularity among kids, it also appeared on parents' radar and on the blocked list for the first time. **Skype**, while still among the six most blocked apps, dropped from second to fifth.



What we expect

In 2021, we expect kids' use of communication apps to reduce but not return to pre-Covid levels. While kids will have less opportunity to use communication apps when going back to school in person, and have more opportunities to socialize in person, apps like **Zoom** will still be mainstream and used in non-business contexts. Many families will still not be able to travel to see family members abroad, keeping connecting via communication apps essential, and ingraining that form of communication as a habit.

We also expect for kids to continue to connect throughout the day as communication apps continue to be used for any distance or hybrid learning, and because messaging or "**Whatsapping**" has become integrated into children's lives, no matter where they are during the day

What we recommend

Our ability to communicate abstract ideas with language and writing is one of the things that makes humans so unique, and so successful as a species. During the pandemic lockdowns, communication apps, and social media apps, helped us stay connected, and ‘stay human’. While screen time needs to be controlled, we do not recommend blocking communication apps entirely, unless there is an issue with a bully or online predator. We do, however, recommend mobile detoxes and downtimes.

In regards to mobile detoxes, they are largely symbolic, which is fine as they increase needed awareness around excess screen time. But to make disconnecting a habit, it needs to become part of a regular routine. To achieve this, downtimes, or down days like ‘Screenless Sundays’ work better. **The most important downtimes are during mealtimes and 1 hour before bed.** Disconnecting at meal times encourages real conversations between family members and cuts back on distractions. Disconnecting an hour before bedtime, protects kids from stimulating blue light on screens. We also recommend keeping digital devices out of the bedroom entirely to avoid

kids having the temptation, and the ‘FOMO’, to check if there is a response to their latest message or post.

Joan Amorós, psychologist and expert in screen time, is dedicating his life to helping people disconnect from their phones and get outdoors. He thinks this is even more important for kids and suggests that “parents should **ensure that for every hour their kids spend online they get one hour outdoors.** It’s my mantra, and it has only become more challenging during the pandemic. So I tell parents to focus on what they can do. Keep track of your child’s screen time with native or external parental controls and balance it with outdoor time on the weekend if you can’t fit it in during the week. If you can’t turn off your phone, turn off alerts, on your child’s chat apps, as well as your own. The first step in teaching your kids good habits, is setting a good example yourself.”

Marc Masip, psychologist and expert in addiction, is passionate about keeping mobile devices out of schools and tells parents, “As you kids go back to school, please don’t send

them with a smartphone. If you need a way to stay in touch with them via a call or SMS on a ‘dumb phone’. Kids are already on their devices all day long. School, even in-person school, is now increasingly online too. Removing the temptation to connect to the internet during school sounds harsh to some parents, but it is really a gift. Kids (and teachers) need a break. And, **studies on schools that prohibit mobile phones in school consistently show: higher rates of concentration, lower rates of cyberbullying, and more chances for real social interaction and physical activity.** To give your child these benefits, delay giving them a smartphone as long as possible.”

“Parents should ensure that for every hour their kids spend online they get one hour outdoors.”

Joan Amorós
Founder of Desconnexions and
Mobile Free Day



Conclusions

2020 was a really difficult year for everyone, but especially kids. While not covered in this report, we must remember with the digital divide there are two very different stories to tell in regards to screen time and the pandemic. For those with access to technology, apps were the primary way that kids remained connected to their friends and extended family during Covid. Being able to enter digital worlds to be able to play, socialize, learn and communicate was overall a positive in a crisis situation, but is it the way we want our kids to live, dependent on their devices, all the time?

Important questions arise, what effect will the excess in screen time – 25% more on online video, 76% more on social media, 23% more on video games, 54% more on education, and 49% more on communication – have on children's physical and mental health not only now, but decades into the future?

Our report is one more indicator that the world is changing and technology is a huge part of it. Propelled by the pandemic, an increasing number of kids worldwide have embraced technology to the point that online is now their main life driver rather than offline. For them, online represents a lifeline and a world full of unwritten rules and opportunity. But, too

many kids are also unaware of all the threats to their safety, privacy, health and even future reputation online.

Parents now more than ever need to talk to their children about the risks online and really get to know the apps that have become daily parts of their lives – co-play Roblox, watch YouTube as a family, and follow the same influencers their kids do on TikTok.

Like last year, we've designed this report with the aim of making it easier to understand which apps kids are using most, what risks to look out for and what to do to create or ensure healthy online habits. We'll continue to do so for as long as technology is an integral part of children's lives, and

especially as they continue to be locked behind screens due to the pandemic.

While 2021 feels more promising in a sense of stabilization, we expect screen time rates to stay at unhealthy levels and for online risks to remain about the same. You can be sure we'll let you know in next year's report on children's digital habits.

Thank you for your interest in Qustodio's research. See you next year.



Contact us

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